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SILVER KNIFE ;

OR,

WICKLIFFE,

The Rocky Mountain Ranger.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON,
AUTHOR OF "PATHAWAY," "NIGHT-SHADE,"
"WHITE-LAW," "HURL, THE HUNCH-
BACK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MY YOUTH.

I WAS born where the snows lie deep in winter, and where the winds blow cold from the hills in summer. I was not the child of idleness. I gathered strength from exertion, and my features were embrowned by exposure to the suns of varying seasons.

I dwelt in a mountain home—faced the cold

breath of the stormy north, and braved the blasts of icy winter. I toiled in the field, and wore the coarse garments of the simple rustic.

Indolence could never be reckoned among my sins; but I disliked exceedingly the monotonous life of tilling the soil. My whole nature revolted at the idea of wasting my youth and manhood upon a few paternal acres, yielding just enough for the actual wants of existence. My inclinations did not flow in that channel; for I had marked out another course for myself.

Every person could delve in the earth; but there were some things which every person could not do—which few could accomplish—deeds which required superior daring or superior genius. I believed I possessed these requisites, and was therefore fitted by nature to perform what the great herd of mankind could not. I felt a proud and lofty satisfaction in nursing and encouraging the idea.

Time, whose foot is tireless, went on his way, placing additional years upon my shoulders, witnessing daily my increasing restlessness.

My father, though indulgent, was a shrewd man. He had watched and studied me. He

knew I was unfit for my present employment, and told me so. I rejoiced that he had made the discovery, hoping that it would lead to my emancipation from the farm; and my hopes were not unfounded. He resolved I should have a profession, and very coolly informed me that he was about to send me away to study medicine. I was surprised, and rejoiced—rejoiced that a change was offered; though, perhaps, had I been permitted a choice, I might have decided on something else. Medicine I had no great liking for at that time, regarding all doctors as solemn, conceited quacks. I have since learned to love the study of medicine, if not the practice. My own inclinations, however, were not consulted. My respectable parent had decided that I should become a physician, and he was a man who could not be turned from his purpose when once resolved.

I submitted, of course; and before a week elapsed my name was regularly entered with a physician. I pass over the details of my progress in the healing-art. I left all competitors behind, and was soon as deep in the mysteries of "Cullen" and "Wistar" as any tyro could well be.



I will now respectfully ask the reader to picture to himself a tall, not bad-looking young man of twenty-two, with the omnipotent characters, "M.D." comfortably appended to his name, making it read Hartley Ferguson, M.D.

But this addition did not seem to astonish the world in the least, and it moved along as usual, insensible, apparently that my importance had been considerably enhanced.

About two months after my advent as a Doctor of Medicine, receiving encouragement from a friend who resided in that portion of the country, I went to St. Louis with the intention of pursuing my profession.

It was there that I formed an acquaintance with Baptiste Leroy, a personage destined to exercise a strong influence upon my future career.

Picture to yourself a man about six feet three inches in height, with eyes deep-set and piercing, hair, though originally dark, plentifully sprinkled with gray, while the sharp features are wrinkled and weather-beaten. He has been a hunter and trapper, for the last twenty years, and knows every inch of the trail from St. Louis to the head waters of the Missouri, as well as he knows his right hand. He has, however, of late years, acted frequently in the capacity of "guide" to parties of emigrants seeking homes in the far West.

He is a man well acquainted with danger and hardship of every kind. He has a family at St. Louis, and is at present recovering from the effects of a wound received in a foray with a war party of Sioux. He had been shot in the leg, and the ball had never been extracted; hence our acquaintance, for I was called upon to treat his wound.

He bore the pain of the operation without flinching, and smiled grimly when I held up the bullet that had given him so much trouble.

"That Redskin's eye never 'll run along the sights again," he said, coolly.

"And why not?" I asked as I drew the lips of the wound together, and thrust a surgeon's needle through the approximated edges.

"He's gone under," he replied.

"What does that mean?"

"Killed, to be sure. I reckon you's never up in the mountains?"

"You are right; I never was. You killed the fellow then?"

"Yes, and lifted his top-knot."

"That is, you scalped him?"

"Sartin."

"It strikes me scalping is a needless piece of barbarity."

"It's the custom up there."

"And a savage one, too."

"Go and live a while on the Oregon trail, and see. When you are among the Romans, you must do as the Romans do. I'm a gettin' to be pretty considerable old now; I've trapped a good many beaver, and killed a great many buffalo, and starved on mule-meat as long as any other man, besides rubbing out a sprinklin' of Injins, and I reckon I know what's what. You've studied medicine, I take it; and larnt to dress cuts, bruises, fractures, and gun-shot wounds, give calamy, and all them sorts o' fixin's. Well, now, I gets shot by the Redskins, and employ you to straighten me up; but I don't undertake to dictate to you how it shall be done. I take it for granted you know best. Don't you take the force of it?"

I acknowledged that I did, though by no means convinced that it was right for white people to imitate savage customs.

CHAPTER II.

MADELEINE.

LEROY's wife was by no means a bad-looking woman. She was a half-breed. He had wooed and won her somewhere near Westport; and "Madge," as he honestly affirmed, "had made him a good wife."

She was small in stature, with coal-black eyes, expressive of intelligence and shrewdness. She had enough native blood to lend her cheek a deeper blush than she could well have borrowed from her French sire. She was now an industrious, sober matron, the mother of two daughters and a son;

the latter being the eldest, and now a fine-looking young man of nineteen.

The daughters were called Madeleine and Mary; making it appear that Leroy had a particular penchant for the initial M. There was only the difference of a year and a half in the ages of Madeleine and Mary; the latter being somewhere between sixteen and seventeen, and the older of the two. I shall not be very particular in describing them at this time, hoping to develop their characters as I proceed.

There was a mild, spiritual beauty about Madeleine, which baffles my skill to describe. Quite tall in person, with figure full and symmetrical, features artistically regular, and eyes dark, restless and flashing, is about all the idea that can be conveyed of her *tout ensemble*.

Mary was of smaller stature, and of a different style of beauty. She had hazel eyes, and a calmer and meeker expression than her sister. Her person was faultless in proportion, and a fit model for a sculptor.

Basil, the son, was in every way worthy of his father; straight as a reed, athletic, and lithe as an Indian, with a large share of genuine good sense.

Leroy's wife and daughters had lived in St. Louis for the last eight years. He had removed them thither in order that the girls might have the advantages of civilization and education. This spoke favorably for the head and heart of the trapper, and proved him infinitely superior to many of his rude brethren who lived upon the trail.

In daily attendance upon Leroy, I found much to admire in his character. I may also add that I was pleased with the restless Madeleine and the placid Mary.

I went to St. Louis with but little hope or expectation of getting into practice. My father had provided me liberally with means, and I had no present fears for the future.

It is true I took an office, and put my name on the door, as a physician and surgeon; but I felt little interest in the result. My thoughts were tending another way.

I listened to the glowing description of Leroy. He talked of boundless prairies, upon which the sun sets as it sets upon the sea; of high mountains which are eternally crowned with diadems of ice; of ravines so deep that day could scarcely light them; of the exciting buffalo-hunt; of steeds that leaped, wide streams and fallen trees, and swam running rivers, swift as the wind, and fearless of an enemy; of dangers incredible; of bloody struggles with the red sons of the forest; of hair-breadth escapes.

My youthful imagination took fire. I could think of nothing but the Oregon trail, and the Rocky Mountains. With regret I saw Leroy making preparations to leave St. Louis; and that regret was doubly enhanced when I learned that his family would accompany him.

I remonstrated with him, and with Madge, on the folly of taking their children into the savage wilds of the West. But my eloquence was lost. They all had enough of the wandering blood in their veins to make them love the forest, and dare its dangers.

"I drew breath away yonder," said Madge, pointing to the west, "and the graves of my friends are there. I have dwelt here for the sake of my children; but I must breathe the free mountain air again before I die. It is my Horeb, my 'land of Israel,' where my bones must be laid. The skies are not high enough here; there is not room enough; there are no prairies, no mountains, none of my kindred. Leroy loves the trail; so do I. I will follow him to the hills where the graves of my people are. I had rather dwell in the caves of the earth, or the cliffs of the valleys, with him, than share a palace here."

"But your daughters —"

"The blood of the mother circulates in their veins. Their hearts sigh for a mountain home. The voice of nature speaks to them, and talks of the wild West. It is to them as Canaan was to the children of Israel, the land of promise, teeming with milk and honey; and the Jordan that intervenes is a mere brook, which they can pass at a bound."

"Is it so?" I asked, turning to Madeleine.

"It is even so," she replied. "My Canaan is indeed away in the West. I shall seek it, though it may be my lot will prove worse than Hagar's when she despaired in the wilderness, and was ready to perish with hunger and thirst. Yes, I shall love the mountains, and hills, and prairies, and forests; but more than all I shall love to be where my father is. The blood that imparts this darkened blush to my cheeks has a voice; it whispers to me forever of the free hills. As my mother has said, we have no kith and kin here. No eye gladdened our coming, and no eye will weep for our going. Why,

then, should we stay, when his home and his (pointing to her father and brother), is beyond the 'Big Blue'—

'Over the hills and far away'?"

I was surprised. I had not expected this. I had not imagined that the silent and timid girl cherished such thoughts, or that she could clothe them in such language.

I turned to the calm Mary; she smiled, and shrank from my earnest gaze.

"And do you also sympathize with the free-born notions of Madeleine?" I asked.

"I do," she answered. "I think I should love to visit the scenes familiar to my parents. My Indian blood won't let me rest. I wish to see something more of life in the wilderness. You will call it a girlish fancy; but with me it is a passion."

"But you will soon tire of it. Beside, you are not strong enough, either of you, to endure the fatigues and dangers of the long and difficult journey."

"Women and children innumerable are, at this moment, on the Oregon trail. Few of them have experienced guides, either; but that will not be the case with us," replied Mary, looking at her father.

"But even he and Basil may not be able to defend you from the savages. You may lie down in fancied security at night, and before morning those dark tresses may grace the belt of a Blackfoot or a Pawnee," I continued.

"God can protect us in all places. Does He not provide for the sparrows? A hair of our heads cannot fall to the ground without His notice. Have you no faith in the promises?"

I was silent. The daughter of Leroy was a better Christian than the son of my father. I returned to my office with my heart full of emotions I could not analyze. I was pensive and melancholy, dissatisfied with myself and everything else. The meditated Hegira of the Leroy's affected me strangely; for I had unconsciously contracted a friendship for them, and I knew their departure would leave a void in my heart.

CHAPTER III.

A LETTER.

THE Leroy's departed, and I was left solitary and sad. I could not banish them from memory. At night I dreamed of the danger that would attend the long pilgrimage of the two girls. I saw every contingency with a feverish trembling. The tales of the old trapper, too, were not without effect. I resolved to follow the Leroy's. I was several days in forming this resolution, but, when once decided, I lost no time in putting it into execution.

I procured a double-barrelled rifle, bullet-moulds, shot-pouch, and ammunition, and, writing a hurried note to my friends to advise them of my purpose, set out for Westport by the steamer "Fire-Fly," intending to finish my outfit after my arrival.

As I was stepping from the levee, a letter was thrust into my hand by a man closely wrapped in a Spanish cloak. His hat was slouched over his eyes, and only the lower portion of his face visible, and that was covered with a shaggy beard.

When we had swung out into the river, and were fairly under way, I went into the cabin to examine it. It proved to be a curious document, written in a dashing, legible hand, and the style was bold and abrupt. It read as follows:

"To HARTLEY FERGUSON:

"Your thoughts are of Madeleine Leroy. I advise you to forget her, for she can never be anything to you. She will be the bride of another,—who, I will not say. To follow her will be a waste of time, and expose you to innumerable dangers. If you are wise, you will abandon a pursuit which can end only in madness. Your hope will be like the deceitful mirage which tantalizes the thirsty traveller upon the desert waste with the sight of water. The object of your ceaseless solicitude will vanish as suddenly as that illusion sinks from the vision of the sojourner upon the arid sands.

"Let the knowledge which this note must assure you I possess in relation to your movements convince you that I shall still keep myself advised of them. Of course you understand

me. I have observed and studied you closely for the last few months, and I am vain enough to think myself an adept in the study of human nature. You please yourself with the idea that you are a man of courage and discretion; but you have very little of either,—just enough of the one to free you from the charge of cowardice, and of the other to keep you out of fire and water.

"You may possibly pass yourself off upon those who do not know you as a thorough man of the world and a gentleman—but pardon me when I honestly affirm that I never shall do violence enough to my feelings to call you either.

"To use a nautical phrase, you have no ballast; you are all on one side. You will never succeed in anything, and are certainly no part of a physician,

"But I will not waste words. I merely wish to show you that you are not deserving of Madeleine Leroy. You have not sufficient stamina to contend with that influence which will continually be exerted against you; so abandon the pursuit, and go home like a good boy. Yours, "VIGILANCE."

Despite all my philosophy, I felt excessively annoyed at the cool impudence of my anonymous correspondent. He certainly had some knowledge of me; that I could not doubt; one allusion of his had proved it.

For a few minutes, I felt like making an assault and battery on the first unlucky object that circumstances should throw in my way; but such feelings soon subsided. I began to regard the letter as a thrust from some individual whom I had offended; and, putting it in my pocket, thought but little more of it until I reached Westport.

Great was my disappointment, on making inquiries at that place, to learn that the Leroy's had gone; and an old voyageur informed me they had started the day before towards the Kansas.

They had a good outfit, and were amply provided with horses and mules, the latter being used to draw a baggage-wagon. The voyageur assured me it would be an easy thing to overtake them in a day, if tolerably well mounted.

I hastened to make arrangements to follow the trail of my friends. It was not difficult to find a large, powerful horse, fit to bear the fortunes of a prince. He was a fine, coal-black, restless fellow. I named him Wyandot, in honor of his former owner, who was an Indian of the Wyandot nation. My steed proved, as the sequel will show, as good as he looked. Beside my double-barrelled rifle, I had brought an excellent pair of rifle-pistols and a revolver from St. Louis. I now procured a pocket-compass, and such other articles as I could well carry, and the nature of the case seemed to demand. I thought of purchasing two horses, one to be employed as a pack-horse; but I renounced this idea upon reflection, believing I should soon overtake Leroy, who had, in all probability, an ample supply of provisions, and would be glad of the acquisition to his strength: moreover, we should be passing through a portion of the wilderness abounding in game. In order to make my debut as a hunter and backwoodsman in appropriate style, I encased myself in dressed deerskin pants, a buckskin coat, and a *Montero* of most approved pattern. When mounted upon the impatient Wyandot, with my rifle slung across my back, my belt profusely ornamented with pistols and knives, and my valise, with other things, lashed to the crupper, I imagine I did not present a very pacific appearance.

I attracted much admiration, no doubt, from the mixed population of Westport, which, by the way, consisted of Spaniards, Frenchmen, Indians, Negroes, Half-breeds, and every shade of human nature, from the darkest to the whitest.

Leaving the dirty log-cabins and huts, I spurred boldly forward on the trail. As I did so, I fancied I saw the same cloaked figure, the same moustached face, with the hat slouched over the eyes, that had appeared to me when the paper was thrust into my hand. I felt quite confident of it then; but circumstances that have transpired since have put the matter beyond doubt.

Whether I really heard a low, derisive laugh, as I passed him, or whether I imagined it, I am unable to decide.

I galloped on, and when an abrupt turn hid me from view he was still standing there, like a bird of evil omen.

I am not naturally superstitious, but the sight of that sinister form, fixed and statue-like, made me nervous for hours after.

Following the Oregon route, I kept on toward the Kansas. I went forward at a round pace, not fearing but I should soon overtake my friends, and surprise them not a little. It was a bright, beautiful July morning, and a ride of half a day braced up my nerves and restored my cheerfulness.

CHAPTER IV.

SILVER-KNIFE.

I WAS not destined to be long without adventures. I should have been sorely disappointed had it been otherwise; for, like the valorous knight of La Mancha, I had gone forth to seek them.

The day passed without interruption. The sun was sinking lazily behind the distant hills. A feeling of loneliness began to steal over me. I was not yet upon the open prairie. My way thus far had been over a rugged and broken country, interspersed with shrubs and trees of various kinds. The trail now led through a thicket of birch and low pine. Contrary to my expectations, I had reached the Kansas.

A more gloomy situation cannot be imagined. I gave the rein to Wyandot, and dashed on as fast as possible; but the way was treacherous, and I was glad to moderate my speed.

The sun said his lingering "good-night," and darkness and clouds shut down upon his track. Wyandot suddenly stopped, and snuffed the air. I knew something was wrong. Quickly leaping from the saddle, I put my eyes as near the earth as possible; I was off the trail. Knowing it would be folly to attempt finding it until morning, I began to look about me for the most eligible spot whereon to pass the night. But the ground was swampy and wet, and augured poorly for a comfortable night's rest.

Taking Wyandot by the bridle, I led him forward toward an eminence on my left, upon which grew a cluster of trees of large growth. The dumb animal pricked up his ears as I advanced, hung back upon the bridle, and manifested a decided aversion to that locality. As I proceeded, I saw smoke curling up through the branches of the trees.

"So we are to have neighbors," I said, patting the arching neck of Wyandot, "and perhaps we shan't like them."

Fastening the horse to a tree, I undertook to reconnoiter in Indian style. Getting upon my hands and knees, I wormed myself forward with the greatest caution. After going on for some time in this painful posture, through a vista in the trees I was enabled to see a person cooking meat over a blazing fire. A closer scrutiny convinced me it was not a white man. His figure was indeed striking and noble, stately as Saul, tall as the cedars of Lebanon.

He might have been forty years of age; possibly younger. His dress seemed above the condition of his red brethren. He wore a tunic of deerskin dressed and white, fringed at the bottom and about the wrists. His leggins were of the same material. The moccasins were of a stouter fabric, and wrought with the quills of the porcupine. His hair was arranged in a style less fantastic than common with his people.

But his features were most remarkable; lofty in their expression, yet calm and self-possessed.

But little time was allowed for further observation. I caught an imperfect view of a dusky figure beyond; saw several arrows strike the noble-looking savage; heard the report of a rifle, and a loud war-whoop. In an instant, several Indians sprang from places of concealment, and attacked the lone warrior.

Without a moment's hesitation, I caught a revolver from my belt, and, with as loud a shout as strength of lungs could afford, rushed to his assistance.

Only those who have had experience in that way can tell the terrible effects of a revolver in a determined hand. Two strong bounds took me to the scene of action. Thrusting my "six-shooter" in the face of a grim savage in the act of striking with a hatchet, I pulled. He went down without a cry.

Finding himself so suddenly reinforced, the lone "brave" uttered a defiant war-whoop, and fought like Richard of the lion heart. And there was need, for there were only two to six.

I also caught the noisy mania, and yelled like all the fiends. And now the revolver showed its qualities, and cracked three times in an incredibly short space, while as many of the enemy acknowledged its fatality by starting off on a spiritual tramp to the "Happy Hunting-grounds." The remaining three turned their wrath upon my hero, who, though he struggled manfully, was fast sinking from loss of blood. They approached him at three different points, and that moment would have been his last, had I not interfered in his behalf. Another of the painted rascals died in the act of striking his hunting-knife into the old warrior's shoulders.

I shot him in the lungs; he rolled over and over, bit the dust, and yelled horribly in the protracted death-struggle.

The other two, seeing the fate of their companions, fled, but not unscathed.

The crack of my pistol upon their track hastened their flight.

The lone Indian and myself stood face to face, regarding each other with a degree of interest which the peculiar circumstances of the case would well justify. He held out his hand; I grasped it, and gave it a hearty shake.

"Good!" he articulated, in a voice from which all traces of excitement had fled.

And that was all he said. His tall figure swayed to and fro for an instant, like the lofty oak that clings tenaciously to its last fibre, while the axe is busy at its heart, and then totters to its fall.

The next moment he lay senseless upon the earth. I hastened to examine his hurts. The most serious was a gun-shot wound in the breast, from which the blood streamed in dark-red torrents. I was prepared for just such an emergency. I had a small case of instruments in my pocket.

It was not without a feeling of deep solicitude that I probed the wound. To my great satisfaction, it had not entered the lungs, but glanced upon the ribs, following their general course toward the spine. In two minutes I held the bullet in my hand. I then dressed the wound as well as circumstances would permit, after which I wet his lips with brandy, and had the pleasure of seeing my patient revive.

Taking a long draught from the bottle held to his mouth, he appeared wonderfully refreshed. Knowing I could do no more for him at present, I turned my attention to Wyandot. Finding an open spot where there was considerable feed, I made him fast, giving him rope enough to provide for his comfort by nipping the tender grass.

When I returned, the red man was sleeping profoundly. Loss of blood had disposed him to rest. I put out the fire, for fear our enemies might return and shoot us by its light, — an operation I had no great relish for.

Wrapping my blanket around me, I sat down to keep watch through the dark night. In about three hours, upon looking at my patient, I found he was regarding me attentively.

He thought it very singular, probably, that a white man should take so much interest in one of his race. His countenance indicated, however, that he was not wholly at a loss to account for it; that he understood something of that great bond of sympathy which reaches through every grade of humanity.

My case of instruments was lying on the ground near him. He pointed to it, saying the magical words.

"Medicine man."

I assented.

"Good!" was the deep response.

I now proceeded to inquire how he felt, and whether he suffered much.

He replied, in very good English:

"Some pain here," putting his hand upon his side. "Shall be better when the sun rises. The red man is strong, and his blood is good. The Happy Hunting-ground is a long way off. The Great Spirit has not spoken to Silver-Knife. When he speaks, the red warrior will go."

"What tribe?" I asked.

"The Nez Perce. My lodge-fire burns far beyond the Big Blue; and the young braves of Silver-Knife are there. I left the great hills to lead the pale-faces upon the trail. When the sun came up, this morning, I started for the home of my people. But the Shawnees are treacherous; they love blood, and hate the Nez Percés. Silver-Knife owes his life to the pale medicine man. He will not forget. White man's memory is bad; but the red man remembers forever."

"My red brother has spoken well. There is no sin like ingratitude and a bad memory."

Saying this, I produced a meerschaum, which I had brought with me, filled it in grave silence, took a long "pull," and, while exhaling the fragrant smoke, passed it to Silver-Knife.

And thus we smoked the pipe of peace.

"Who keeps the lodge-fire bright, in the absence of Silver-Knife?" I asked.

"The Morning Star and the Singing Bird," he replied.

"Those are the daughters of my red brother?"

Silver-Knife nodded assent.

"Has my red friend no squaw, and no sons?"

"He has both. They are upon the buffalo-hunt. Where is my white brother going?"

"Away to the big mountains to hunt, and to see the customs of his red brothers."

"Let my white brother turn back when the sun has risen, or he will lose his scalp. The red man is the enemy of the pale-face."

"Is the pale-face a squaw, that he should fear to meet his

enemies? His heart is young and strong, and his scalp is safe. He will not turn back."

"Good! My brother has a big heart. Our great father will make him a war-chief."

Having smoked our pipe, and it being the opinion of Silver-Knife that the two natives would not trouble us again, I spread my blanket upon the ground, and slept. In the dreams that followed, I saw the "Morning Star" and the "Singing Bird," fair as the daughters of Rechab, and dignified as the sons.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRAIRIES.

It was broad daylight when I awoke. The first object that met my gaze was Silver-Knife sitting by a blazing fire. At a short distance from him, suspended from the branch of a tree, were the scalps of the three Indians we had killed.

He was regarding them with evident satisfaction while the morning's meal was cooking by the fire.

I ate with a good relish; and Silver-Knife, despite his wounds, had lost nothing of his appetite.

After smoking a while in silence, it was agreed that we should go forward in company. This arrangement was very agreeable to me, for several reasons.

I found Wyandot rather restless, having cropped all the grass within reach.

The horse of Silver-Knife was discovered at a short distance, "hobbled" in true Indian style. It had fortunately escaped the rapacity of the Shawnee visitors. It was a very superior animal, in every way fit for a companion for Wyandot.

We soon reached the Kansas, and had no difficulty in crossing upon a raft. We stopped at Fort Leavenworth only long enough to inquire about Leroy. He had passed there twenty-four hours previously, and I was doomed to disappointment once more.

We met several Kansas Indians during the day, and encamped at night by a small stream. We kept on for eight days without interruption, and reached the Platte river without hearing anything of Leroy. I grew impatient. We had travelled rapidly, and must have passed them on the way. We were now, to the best of our judgment, about three hundred miles from Westport; and I began to be sensible of the error of such precipitate travelling.

I resolved to wait a day or two where we were, to give Leroy time to come up, providing I was correct in my conjectures. To this Silver-Knife made no objections. We had seen signs of buffalo during the last day's ride, and were determined to have a hunt, and lay in a store of meat for future use.

For security against the Pawnees and other roving bands of Indians, we constructed a camp of small cotton-woods. This could not have been accomplished without the aid of Silver-Knife's hatchet, and we were not a little proud of our rude dwelling, when completed. When this was done, Silver-Knife went forth to kill a buffalo, leaving me to guard the premises.

It was near the night-time. On one hand a boundless prairie stretched away toward the setting sun, while a thick growth of cotton-wood was upon the other. I grew thoughtful. Where were the daughters of Leroy — the restless Madeleine, and the calm Mary? Perhaps they had already fallen victims to savage cruelty. I shuddered at the thought, and felt that I could not remain in suspense much longer without being positively wretched.

And why should I be wretched? Sure enough? What was Madeleine Leroy to me? Nothing, of course; but, in common friendship, I felt it my duty to protect her, so far as it was in my power to exert any agency in her behalf.

I caught Wyandot, and saddling him, mounted and galloped away over the prairie, without any fixed purpose. Perhaps I had a vague hope of meeting Leroy, but no thought of danger. Well mounted, and well armed, as I was, I felt myself equal to a dozen redskins in fair fight.

I dashed on for about half an hour, when I saw a single horseman coming down upon me at a pace equal to my own.

The cause of his haste was soon obvious. A score of enemies were in headlong pursuit. The pursuing party were gaining, their horses being in better plight.

One, far in advance of the rest, was within twenty yards of

the solitary rider, whom I was about giving up for lost, when he suddenly faced about, and I saw a puff of smoke curl up, while, at the same moment, the pursuer dropped from his horse.

The pursued turned and spurred on, loading as he came. It was Silver-Knife. Wyandot reared and plunged, while his eyes shot fire. "He snuffed the battle afar off."

I gave him the rein, but not the spur; he was too eager for the fray to need that. I never felt so much of the mad demon in my blood before. With a snort and a bound, Wyandot sprang toward Silver-Knife. The hoofs of the noble animal spurned the ground, as if he disdained to touch it.

"Good!" exclaimed the brave old chief, as I thundered up to his side; and then he quickly added, "Pawnees."

"How many?" I asked.

"Twenty."

"Then we will destroy half of them," said I, firmly.

The old man looked in my face with a grim smile. The iron rigidity of the muscles of the mouth told him that my purpose was fixed and dangerous.

"The white devil is up," he muttered, while, at the same moment, he drew the driver from his rifle, turned in his stirrups, and shot down the foremost of the enemy.

"Another one will soon be in range," he added, coolly, and sent home a ball.

I slackened my speed, and another did come within range, and never got out of it. I aimed right between his wolfish-looking eyes, and when my rifle cracked the poor painted wretch leaped straight up from his horse, without a single sound to tell that the death agony was upon him. Quivering an instant like a galvanized corpse, he sank down upon the waving prairie grass, without a pulse of life or a nut-shell full of breath in his body.

"There's a scalp for you," I said to Silver-Knife, as another native bore rapidly down upon us.

We were now likely to have sharp work of it. The main body was close at hand, whooping and howling, as though the infernal regions had burst their bounds, and released their inmates.

I now spurred forward as fast as I could, to gain time to load once more before they got too near for rifle practice.

Before I had sent home another charge, Silver-Knife fired for the third time, and the unearthly yell that followed told with what effect. It did not prove so dead a shot as mine; for when I turned in the stirrup to let drive again, an Indian was rolling about as though he didn't care but little how much he beat down the tall grass.

"I shot him in that way to scare the rest," said Silver-Knife, who was the coolest Indian in fight that I ever saw during all my experience among the Rocky Mountains.

Several of our pursuers were armed with rifles, and bullets began to whistle about our ears. One gigantic fellow was preparing to fire as I cast my eye over the prairie in search of another victim.

I did not feel like adopting Silver-Knife's style of killing; and so thought I would learn from actual experiment whether my large friend's *os frontis* was bullet proof. But I under-shot; the ball took effect in the centre of his proboscis. He tried to utter the war-cry of his people, dropped his gun, threw up his arms, and fell back over his horse's tail. That was the last I saw of that Indian.

An Indian is a coward so long as he sees a loaded rifle before him; but the moment it is discharged witnesses a complete transformation in the animal, — he becomes as brave as the bravest. It was so in this case. I had held three or four in check with my rifle before I fired, but the instant they heard the discharge they rushed toward me, yelling horribly, with up-lifted hatchets.

I felt a sort of unnatural joy in thinking of the surprise that was in reserve for them. The first one that was near enough acknowledged the superiority of "revolvers" by tipping out of his saddle in a very ungentlemanly manner.

And now the others thought they were sure of me, seeing me, as they believed, holding out and menacing them with an empty pistol, and they laughed in savage scorn.

A stout, black-looking fellow, with a profusion of bears' claws strung about his neck, several scalps at his belt, and more profusely bedevilled than any of his companions, thought it would be a good plan to impale me upon his long spear, and thus make me an example to all other pale-faces.

I did not approve of such a procedure, not wishing to be spitted like a turkey for a Thanksgiving festival. Because he had cherished such an unknightly thought, I passed instantly over to the stomach-and-lung-shooting system of Silver-Knife,

and let him have it through the sternum, just below his neck-lace of bear-claws.

How he howled and tore up the grass! He was floundering there when I was too far away to see him, or offer a word of consolation.

The third came to a dead halt. He never went forward again, if I except a lofty tumble over his horse's head.

There was now a temporary cessation of hostilities. The Indians, seeing the fate of so many of their warriors, held back and huddled together on a little eminence, like sheep. They were probably holding a council. I looked about for Silver-Knife; he was scalping the dead.

This edifying employment was soon completed, for an Indian will rid an enemy of his hair in an incredibly short time.

I was differently engaged—reloading my three empty barrels.

"They're about to charge upon us," said Silver-Knife. "I don't feel very strong—sore from wounds—better run for it, and get 'em scattered about the prairie."

This was very good advice, and we scampered away as fast as our horses would carry us; and that was at a dashing rate, for Wyandot was in good condition, and the chief's horse was not blown.

There are many things which a man of action and adventure meets with which are exceedingly hard to describe. In a particular manner is this true of the adventurer in the Rocky Mountains. For instance, it is difficult to convey a correct or definite idea of a dozen savages, mounted on fleet horses without saddles, and many without bridles, mad with repulse, eager for vengeance, and bedaubed wickedly with war-paint. To be fully impressed with the wildness of such a spectacle, one must see with his own eyes. Mere ink-drops cannot picture the scene; it is exciting, madly exciting.

Our enemies were again in motion. If they had been indebted to shouting and howling for their motive power, they would have been victors in the race. When a savage can do nothing else, he can yell bravely.

The result of all this racing was what Silver-Knife had predicted and wished; our foes were soon scattered over the plain, although they kept as near together as they could: but some were better mounted, and left their less lucky companions in the rear. We reached our camp of cotton-woods in safety, while the savages drew up at the distance of about three hundred and fifty or four hundred yards, to devise means for dislodging us. Our horses were taken into camp, and we prepared to act on the defensive.

"I think I will try a shot at one of those fellows while they are taking counsel together," I said.

"Too far," replied Silver-Knife. "Ball won't hold up—shoot the ground."

"I'll decide that," I answered; and, stepping into the open air, rested my rifle upon the limb of a scrubby birch.

The Indians laughed in derision, and one of them expressed his unmitigated contempt by some very insulting pantomime.

"You don't know the mettle of a Yankee rifle, my gentleman," I muttered, as I took a steady aim at the "brave" who had figured so conspicuously in dumb show. I fired, and never saw a pair of heels fly up into the air any quicker than did his. His astonishment could not have been greater had he been struck down by some electric agency; at least, that was my opinion at the time, and I still retain a vivid impression of it. Had he practised ground and lofty tumbling all his life, he could not have gone through a series of gymnastic exercises with greater expedition.

The aerial part of the performance soon ended, and he finished the whole by a few spasmodic kicks, as he lay prone on his back.

"They did n't expect that," said Silver-Knife, laconically. "They think you one grand medicine."

"What do you think they will do?" I asked.

"If they get courage enough, they will charge upon us; if not, they will wait till dark and try to surprise us."

The opinion of the Nez Perce seemed prophetic, for, with one startling whoop, they all tore away and were soon out of sight.

The last streak of daylight faded from the darkening west as the last of the painted figures swept from view.

CHAPTER VI.

A REÜNION.

A FEELING of sadness stole over me as I gazed on the track of the departing foe. My philosophical speculations in regard to their claims to an immortal soul were interrupted by hearing the sound of a woodman's axe.

"White man," said Silver-Knife.

"How can you tell?" I asked.

"White man strikes heavy and regular; axe bigger than Indian hatchet."

The sounds were close at hand. Desirous of knowing who was camping near us, I led forth Wyandot, and trotted away in the direction whence they came.

A great burden of anxiety was lifted from my mind when I saw Basil cutting vigorously into a tree, and a baggage-wagon drawn up a short distance in the rear. He seized his rifle when he heard the unexpected tramp of a horse; but dropped it in sheer amazement when he saw who came.

"Well, I reckon the gals 'll be glad to see you," he said, giving my hand a hearty shake. "It beats all!"

"How are your father and mother?" I asked, rather awkwardly.

"They're well enough; why don't you ask how the gals are?"

"How do your sisters do, then, and how do they bear the fatigues of the journey?"

"First rate; they like it a heap; mention your name every day. Come, let's find 'em."

With a trepidation for which I was at a loss to account, I followed Basil.

"Go, and surprise 'em," he added, pointing to two figures reclining upon the grass at a short distance. Before they had any warning of my approach, I stood confronting them.

"Hartley Ferguson!" cried both, with a start of astonishment.

"The same," I replied, bowing with mock formality. "Did you expect me?"

Madeleine blushed.

"I cannot say that I ever expected to meet you again," she murmured.

At that moment we were joined by Leroy and his wife, and I was obliged to relinquish the hands of the girls for theirs.

"Turned adventurer, at last," said Leroy. "I always thought that you were of that make. We are glad to see you."

"And we shall not consent for you to leave us," added Madge.

After asking and answering questions for some time, I related the principal events of my journey, and invited them to share my camp, for greater security against the savages.

"I thought the Pawnees were getting civilized. I always know'd the creturs would steal, and were too lazy to work, but they have n't given me much trouble lately. You can't trust 'em, though. They're desperate deceitful and cunning."

In half an hour we were all safely at camp. Felling some more cotton-woods, we made a shelter for the horses and mules. This precaution was rendered necessary by the proximity of the Indians.

When we had strengthened our position as much as possible by every expedient which the experience of Leroy or Silver-Knife could suggest, we sat down to a cup of coffee and a roast of buffalo-meat with a good appetite.

Leroy and Basil were soon on the best of terms with the Nez Perce chief. They had met before. It struck me that they were fitly mated: well armed and fed, they would be of themselves a host, and might travel the whole Indian territory in comparative safety.

Both had a very accurate knowledge of the predatory and vicious habits of the dwellers in the wilderness. The noble figure of Silver-Knife, his frank and open expression, native dignity of bearing, and the honest, hardy features, and tall, sinewy frame of Baptiste Leroy, could not fail to produce a favorable impression upon the thoughtful observer.

Quite a change had taken place in the external appearance of the girls since last I saw them at St. Louis.

Over their ordinary dresses were tunics of soft, white deer-skin, dressed by a skilful hand. They wore Indian moccasins ornamented very beautifully with porcupine-quills. Instead of bonnets, gypsy hats were tied beneath the chin with ribbon.

They were cheerful and smiling; and their appearance was interesting as well as novel. My coming had put them all

in good humor. There was only one damper upon our enjoyment, and that was the fear of another visit from the Indians.

"I know the disposition of the varmints well," said Leroy, while he proceeded to put his weapons in order. "They won't let us rest long, you may depend on't. They burn to avenge the death of their companions. We must keep a sharp lookout, or some on us will go under afore morning."

"Long Rifle" (it was thus Leroy was known among many of the Indian tribes) "has spoken well. The red-men will not rub the war-paint from their faces. Their young men have fallen, and their scalps hang in the wigwam of my white brother. They will come for blood before the sun rises. Silver-Knife has spoken. Let the young medicine man speak."

"My red brother is wise. He follows the war-path of his enemies, and returns with many scalps. He can hunt the buffalo, trap the beaver, and teach his young men to bend the bow. He hath spoken well," I answered.

As soon as the evening meal was despatched, the fire was extinguished. Silver-Knife and Leroy were in earnest council together for some time; the latter looked serious.

When they had ceased speaking, Silver-Knife took his rifle, tightened his belt, and walked quietly away.

"Where is he going?" I asked of Baptiste.

"To reconnoitre. If there are any varmints round, he'll find 'em. Nobody can follow a trail, or read Injin signs, like that old Nez Perce chief."

"He is brave, too," I remarked.

"None bolder. As a general thing, I an't fond o' copper skins: the best of 'em will steal your horse and take your scalp; but he's an exception. There's somethin' kind o' human-like in his countenance. I'd trust that heathen Injin as soon as I would some white men, and a heap sooner."

"He'll go under to-night, if he an't careful," said Basil. "He and Ferguson have made tearing work with the two-legged animals, and they an't the most forgetful cattle in the world."

"That Nez Perce was n't born to be rubbed out in that way. He'll die like a human cretur, in his wigwam. That's my belief. Now, Hartley, you and the women-folks can go to sleep as soon as you please, and Basil and I will watch. If there's any trouble, you'll be likely to hear on't."

To this I objected. I resolved to watch also. I was too much interested in the safety of Madeleine and Mary to lie down quietly to my dreams. And now, for the first time, I noticed they were both armed. A pistol and a dagger graced the belts that encircled their waists.

From the daughters I glanced to the mother; she wore the same weapons.

"The garison is well armed," I said, with a smile.

"Of course," answered Madeleine. "You do not expect, do you, that we are such useless dolls that we cannot make even a show of resistance? Shame upon the girl who has not spirit enough to strike a blow in defence of those she loves, and for the safety of her own person!"

"Very well spoken," I replied.

"Perhaps I may act well, too, in a moment of danger. Females are not cowards. If they grow pale, or sometimes faint, it is not for themselves; it is for those they love."

"Who taught you such chivalric sentiments?" I asked, still smiling.

"Why should you ask such a question, Hartley Ferguson? Nature taught me the feelings I have attempted to express in words. Don't blaspheme your own perception of right and wrong, of high and low, by affecting not to understand me."

"I do both understand and admire," I replied. "I can picture a woman endowed with the high qualities you have spoken of, and something more than a doll. I have never cherished the opinion that females are deficient either in moral or physical courage. But we are the slaves of habit; circumstances govern, and make us what we are. We naturally conform to those influences by which we find ourselves surrounded."

"Those sentiments are more worthy of you."

"Now, tell me, how have you fared thus far, on your way to the promised land?"

"Quite as well as we could expect, and perhaps better than we deserve. We have been menaced with danger in one or two instances; but our lucky planet has prevailed. This morning we met half a dozen Sioux, whose movements excited the suspicion of my father. He said they were too glad to see us, and that mischief was probably intended. One of the number, Basil affirmed, looked like a white man, despite his paint and Indian finery."

When Madeleine spoke of a white man, I could not help thinking of my moustached friend at St. Louis and Westport.

Perhaps he would do as he threatened. It would be an easy thing, for a person disposed to mischief, to dog our footsteps. The present of a few beads or knives, or a few yards of gaudy ribbon and cloth, would be a sufficient inducement for the Indians, or half-breeds, to become his emissaries.

There was nothing very exaggerated in such an idea. Some reckless libertine might have seen Madeleine, and loved her,—if the word love can be employed in such a connection without profaning it.

She would reject his overtures, of course. Angry at rebuff, he would seek some means of retaliation.

I resolved to question Basil in regard to the supposed white man. I sought him; but he was gone, and had not been missed. I expressed fears for his safety. If Leroy felt any apprehensions, he did not express them, but smoked his pipe in silence.

After a time, he condescended to remark that the lad probably knew what he was about; but, at the same time, appeared uneasy.

"Everything is ordered by Providence, and can't be changed," he went on to say. "Such as are for the sword, to the sword; such as are for famine, to famine; and such as are for captivity, to captivity. Thus saith the scripter."

This, I dare say, was excellent philosophy, and very Christian-like, but under the circumstances was not very consoling.

Several hours of the solemn night wore away. A few straggling stars came out, to shed an imperfect light upon the scene. They reminded me of those faint hopes which dawn upon our darkest prospects. Their silvery, delicate beams were just sufficient to reveal to each an indistinct and dreamy outline of the other.

All were wakeful and anxious.

The tall form of Leroy stood fixed and motionless by the camp-door. His right hand rested upon the muzzle of his long and deadly rifle. It had been his favorite for many years; it was his friend, his companion; he had proved it. Next to his wife and children, that weapon was dear to him. It had been with him in hours of danger; it had thinned the ranks of his enemies; had brought down the buffalo, the elk, the antelope, when he was perishing with hunger.

What could supply the place of the rifle? Nothing. Without it he could not pursue the wandering life of which he was so deeply enamored.

CHAPTER VII.

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

SUDDENLY a lofty figure darkened the door. It was Silver-Knife.

"Any signs?" asked Leroy, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Away toward the sunset."

"How many?"

"Perhaps twenty-five, perhaps thirty."

"How soon before they'll be down upon us, do you think?"

"In half an hour you will hear their war-cry, and see the paint upon their faces."

"Well, let 'em come. There won't many go back again. This bit of old iron'll speak a word to 'em they don't like. You may put it down as sartin that they won't stay long arter they've found out old Ironsides is here."

By "old Ironsides" he meant his rifle, which he had named, very appropriately, as he believed, after the ship Constitution, upon the theme of whose exploits he was sometimes very eloquent.

"I an't the man that loves to kill human creturs, because life's precious, and they may n't be prepared exactly for the change: but when I rub out one o' them painted heathen, I don't feel as though I'd committed a crime, that's sartin. But, Silver-Knife, you an't like the rest of 'em. I can hai. you as a feller-cretur. You're what I call a true man, and I'm the old hoss what would stick by ye to the last. Here's my hand on't."

Silver-Knife took the proffered hand, and shook it gravely. Then, after a pause, said: "There are pleasant lands beyond the big hills. They abound with game. The Indian's corn and the white man's grain will grow there. The Great Spirit has given those fertile valleys and wide prairies to the Nez Perces. They find it a goodly place to dwell in. There is

room enough for my white brother. He shall go there and fulfil his days in peace. His wife, and his son, and the Pale Lilies, shall go with him; and the great medicine man shall not tarry behind. My people will give them the hand of friendship. They will build lodges for them near the pleasant hunting-grounds. The colds of winter shall not freeze them, and the suns of summer shall not burn them. There is wood to make the lodge-fire bright, and grateful arbors formed by the branches of trees, to ward off the fervid suns of summer. When they are hungry, they can go forth and hunt; when they are thirsty, they can drink from the running streams. What says Long Rifle, and the pale medicine man?"

For a time we were silent, touched with the magnanimity of the chief. A smile played over the features of Madeleine. Even the calm Mary gathered a spark of enthusiasm from the war-chief.

Old Baptiste Leroy passed the back of his rough hand across his face, as if to brush away the clouds and make his vision clearer.

"Long Rifle has heard the words of his red brother. They have sounded to him like the pleasant murmuring of waters when one is thirsty," answered Leroy. "Silver-Knife has a great heart. The heart of Long Rifle says, Go to the pleasant lands. Let the others speak."

"I love the counsels of the war-chief," said Madge. "I will follow him beyond the big hills."

"Good," said Madeleine, with comic gravity, while she held out her hand to the chief. "The Pale Lilies will go with him. Their lodge-fire shall burn near his. I give you my hand, — henceforth we are friends."

Silver-Knife laid the fair hand of Madeleine upon his heart.

"The daughter of Long Rifle is comely. The heart of her red brother is toward her. The Morning Star and the Singing Bird shall welcome the Pale Lilies. Women speak better than the rough war-chief."

"The Morning Star and the Pale Lily shall sing together," I added.

"You are perverting Scripture," answered Madeleine archly. "But you have not said you shall go with us beyond the hills."

She stood very near me — I could feel her breath on my cheek while she spoke. I could not resist taking her hand, and pressing it in mine.

"I shall not leave you — *I will go with you*, wherever it may be your destiny to wander."

My voice was low and deep; for the words were not "the words of poor, common courtesy," which are such a "very mockery."

The little hand seemed to shrink and wither as it lay in mine; and the next moment it was withdrawn. What did it mean? Years of life appeared to be placed upon my head in a moment of time.

I was moody and dissatisfied. All anxiety in regard to surrounding danger faded away, as a minor consideration.

Mary stole cautiously to my side, and said she feared for the safety of Basil.

Silver-Knife warned us to silence and watchfulness.

Leroy had been observing some moving object for the last few minutes, which proved to be the object of our solicitude — Basil. He crept in with the noiseless tread of an Indian. He had news for us; a party of savages were creeping slowly toward the camp on our right.

We now disposed ourselves about the camp according to the advice of Leroy. Our cotton-woods had been so arranged, one upon the other, that rude loop-holes had been left for an emergency. We thrust our rifles through these upon each side of the camp, Leroy and myself being upon that where the attack was first expected.

We had not been long in this belligerent attitude when my companion solicited my attention, by a touch upon the arm. He directed my gaze with his finger. At no great distance I could plainly see some object in motion. It did not require much stretch of imagination to determine it an Indian brave. His movements were as stealthy as a cat's, proving him an adept.

"He expects to find us sleeping," whispered Baptiste.

The scout was soon within a few yards of the camp. Seeing that all was dark and still, he grew bolder, — arose to his feet, and advanced.

Imitating Silver-Knife and Leroy, we stretched ourselves upon the ground and feigned sleep; but the lids were not quite closed, for all felt the necessity of sleeping with one eye open.

It would seem that the scout was bent on a piece of bra-

vado. With noiseless tread, he came to the camp door and looked in.

The tall, gaunt figure stood there nearly a minute. Perhaps he thought seriously of coming in, and taking a scalp, and thus immortalizing his name. It was not very light within, and I do not imagine he could tell our numbers accurately. He stalked away, at length, as silently as he came.

"Good!" exclaimed Silver-Knife, with that peculiar guttural sound that characterizes his race.

"He will soon be back with more," said Leroy, in answer to my look of inquiry. "They will come up boldly, thinking to surprise and slay us without resistance; but old Ironsides 'll have a word to say about that. They'll come down upon us on this side. Don't fire till they get close to the muzzles of our rifles. Don't waste any powder — let every shot tell. Aim at the eyes. Gals, keep back there, out o' the way of the balls. Them varmints don't stand for shooting women, or children either. Now, let every one shut his mouth, and keep his tongue between his teeth."

We were well prepared for an enemy, armed to the teeth, beside being fortified. I had a double-barrelled rifle, a revolver, and a brace of common pistols. The latter I lent to Silver Knife, as he needed them more than myself.

Leroy had regular horse-pistols of astonishing calibre, and they had seen service as well as old Ironsides. This was not all. He had two double-barrelled shot-guns, carefully loaded with ball.

I felt but little anxiety in regard to the result, for five times our number could not well dislodge us.

What Leroy had predicted proved sooth. First, the spy showed his painted visage, and then another and another of his brethren, until we could not count them.

There never was a finer opportunity for an effective shot. As they advanced they covered just enough ground to allow each of us to single out his victim.

They came on in silence. There was no misgiving, no hesitation, no doubts in their minds in regard to the results. They considered us sure game — had already counted our scalps. Soon were they undecieved.

When they were so near that the whites of their eyes were visible, we fired.

It was truly a deadly volley, followed by a shriek of agony, and a prolonged cry of rage and disappointment. I discharged both my barrels simultaneously, and have good reason to suppose they took effect.

To our consternation, the cries of the savages were met by answering yells upon the opposite quarter. We sprang to meet them. A volley from our pistols and the smooth-bores repulsed them. It was now one continued scene of attack and repulse. Wherever a copper visage revealed itself, a rifle-ball found its owner.

They attempted to fire the prairie grass, and the wood upon our left, but both were too green to burn. It was a fortunate circumstance, for it would have driven us from our covert, when we should have been exposed to a destructive volley. The females did not fail to perform their share in the night's exploits. They reloaded our empty weapons with a coolness and dexterity worthy of emulation.

After the first onset the enemy took shelter in the cotton-woods, from whence they poured upon us a continual shower of balls; but we were protected by our little fort, upon which the harmless lead kept pattering incessantly.

In their several attempts to storm us, they were glad to scamper back to the shelter of the trees.

"Old Ironsides" was fearfully busy. When *that* cracked, a fiercer yell rang out upon the night air.

"I told you they know'd this bit of iron," said Baptiste, wiping the burnt powder from the pan. "They've been acquainted with it goin' on twenty years, and they know its voice as well as I know Madge's. It's spoken to a heap on 'em, and the heathen creturs are ready to jump e'enamost out o' their skins when they hear it. I've made longer shots with old Ironsides than has ever been made on the prairies afore or since. I can fetch down a buffalo at four hundred yards; but when it comes to them red Injuns, I pepper 'em at six. I can crease one on 'em two hundred yards further than I can a buffalo or a wild hoss. But three hundred yards is about the right thing, as it gives a feller a chance to display a little more science like. I shoot 'em in the eye at that distance, and the gentile creturs don't like that style of finishin'. It's rayther my opinion, if you should go out and turn over some of the varmints in the morning, you'd find a hole in their greasy featur's right where an eye ought to be. That's my mark. I'm sure to make it in the day-time, and they know it. I never knew but one chap that could do that,

and that was an old hoss from Texas, and he'd do it every time. He said there was a heap o' fun in it. He come all the way up here to practise, and thought no more of rubbin' out a heathen than you would of knockin' down a turkey-buzzard."

When the first beam of daylight reddened the west, with a loud whoop the savages left us. They had gained nothing in the encounter; but, on the contrary, lost many of their numbers. They had carried away but few of their dead, and we found them stark and stiff, scattered in all directions. The spy laid on his face near the camp.

"I'll wager my traps that that Injun cretur is shot in the eye," said Leroy.

With his foot Basil turned him over. It was even so; the ball had entered the organ of vision, and found its way out the back of the head. His exit had been sudden and easy. Many Christians die harder deaths than did that poor Indian.

Silver-Knife relieved him of his scalp with remarkable dexterity; and that interesting operation he performed for several that morning.

"Does no good," he said, in a moralizing way, "but it's the custom of my people. Old habits strong. Red men can't get civilized all at once, as the pale medicine man thinks."

We did not think proper to move forward that day, as we might fall into an ambush. Those with us were precious, and we did not wish to expose them unnecessarily. I would have faced death any day for Madeleine, although I felt there was an insuperable barrier between us.

What that barrier was, I knew not; but I feared the worst — that she could not regard me as other than a friend. Nothing had been said of love, it is true; but she could not help knowing that she was more to me than a friend.

But my friendship was not selfish. I felt as deep solicitude for her safety as I should have done had she lavished upon me all the wealth of her affections.

We ventured out but little during the day. Basil brought in a finger that had evidently been shot off during the skirmish. Silver-Knife examined it.

"That grew upon a white man's hand," he said, passing it to Leroy, with a shake of the head.

The old guide scrutinized it closely.

"That bit o' human flesh never come off o' one of them. Injun creturs. It growed on as white a hand as mine, or the doctor's. Pity it had n't been his renegade head. I'd kinder like to bring old Ironsides to bear on him once. If the truth was known, I've an idee he an't much better than them copper-skin individooals, nor hardly so good."

It was now my turn to look. It was indubitably a white man's property. But what was he doing with the Indians?

This was a question which would bear several constructions. To me it was another link in the chain of evidence I had been collecting of a lurking enemy.

If my thoughts and suspicions were tending to the right point, every step we took in the Indian country would be attended with some new danger. I felt the need of counsel. Silver-Knife was cautious and discreet.

I took him aside, read him the letter, and told him my suspicions. I did not forget the fact that Basil had seen, or thought he had seen, a white man with a party of warriors, which, taken in conjunction with the letter, the man I had seen at Westport, and the severed finger, tended to make out quite a case.

The war-chief heard me without interruption. After a long silence he shook his head gravely, and said,

"White man very bad. He loves the Pale Lily. Let the pale medicine man beware. If serpents went upright, we could see them; but they crawi in the grass, and no sound gives warning of their approach. Very dangerous is the snake in the grass."

In the afternoon Silver-Knife went out to reconnoitre. The night closed in before he returned. He had seen no enemies. The hours of darkness passed unmolested, and we were on the "winding way" early in the morning.

I will not dwell with tedious minuteness upon every step of our march. It would tax the patience of the reader too severely. After six days' travel from our camp of cotton-woods, we reached the North Fork of Platte river. Nothing worthy of notice occurred during this time.

It was now the 20th of July. Upon looking over my papers, I found the following in my diary:

"July 20th. — I have now sojourned twenty days in the wilderness. And for what? I cannot tell. Danger lurks in every step, and yet I go on, and cannot turn back.

"Is Madeleine Leroy the magnet that attracts me hither? No it cannot be. But she is very comely to look upon — yes, more than comely — beautiful. And there is music in her voice, too. When she speaks, I wish to hear no other sound. There is a restless light in her eye which flashes out at times like sunlight. I am always near her — never tire of riding at her side. She is a skilful horsewoman, and never looks more graceful than when in the saddle. A charming girl on horseback is a pleasant sight, and dangerous also.

"21st. — I must think no more of Madeleine. I must fly from her. It is dangerous to linger longer at her side; but I am happy only there; yet I talk more with the placid Mary than with her. I feel a reserve in her presence, which increases daily. There is a native dignity about her that awes me. I believe I really blush in her presence. I cannot approach the subject nearest my heart.

"22d. — This is unmanly. I was never abashed in the presence of ladies of the highest refinement. I do not tremble to meet an enemy; and yet am awkward and silent beside this child of nature — this demi-savage. * * * * *

"Silver-Knife is still with us. He is the noblest specimen of his race. He says we are now in the Sioux country. We travel with great weariness. This morning I saw a horseman far away in the distance. He has hovered about us ever since. My telescope tells me he is not an Indian. He seems an accomplished horseman, and is well mounted. What can he be doing alone in this hostile region? I cannot imagine." * * * * *

Upon the afternoon of the 23d the horseman mentioned in the diary was seen slowly approaching. As he advanced, he was an object of much interest. He maintained his seat in the saddle with ease and dignity. In person he was somewhat above the ordinary size. His expression was grave to moodiness. His features could not justly be called handsome; but they were noble, notwithstanding the deepened color which the prairie suns had lent. In his dress there was no attempt at gaudiness or show. If he had any peculiarity in this respect, he went to the opposite extreme.

His buck-skin frock was without any pretensions to ornament; but it had strength and durability. The same will apply to his deer-skin breeches, and moccasins. His head was covered by a light foraging-cap. A rifle, the workmanship of which proved it a costly one, was slung across his back. He wore side-arms also, according to the custom of the back-woodsmen. The animal which bore him was of an iron-gray color, of the largest proportions, and obviously a steed of spirit and bottom.

There was something like *hauteur* in his manner when he returned our salutations, and I felt that he was a proud, moody man. He seemed startled when he perceived there were females with us, and I thought his eyes rested longer upon Madeleine and Mary than was absolutely necessary. My brow contracted. Perhaps he noticed it, for his finely-chiselled lips curled as if in scorn. Wyandot evidently excited his admiration, for he proved a connoisseur in horse flesh.

"Where is your camp, stranger?" asked Leroy.

"Where the night finds me," he answered.

"Where's your companions?"

"I have none."

"I reckon you don't mean to tell this old hoss that you're all alone among these heathen creturs."

"I meant as I said, sir. I have no companions, — a brave man needs none."

"Good!" exclaimed Silver-Knife. "The white brother has a big heart."

"What keeps you from being shot by the varmints?" asked Leroy.

"He who keeps the universe. During the time I have been a pilgrim in these wilds, I have learned wisdom by experience. I seldom pass a night very near the trail left by emigrants and adventurers. The Indian naturally looks for his human game there. I seek haunts untrodden. When I lie down for the night in places of peril, I kindle no fire, unless it is very cold. Many prefer comfort to safety, and are scalped by the light of their own fire. I do not, but am no coward; no man dare call me such. I value life but lightly, and it would cost me scarcely a regret to relinquish it; but I would not die by the knife of a savage."

This was said in a voice neither condescending nor haughty, but quiet. If Leroy had been a man of any pretensions, he would not have said so much. I read enough of his nature to know that.

"Have you been long a wanderer in this wilderness?" interrogated

The sound of my voice seemed to awaken him from a dream. For a moment his eyes dwelt upon my face in earnest scrutiny, and then that inexplicable change in his expression passed away, leaving his visage stern, dark and moody, as before.

I had to repeat the question before he appeared to hear it.

"Longer than I care to name," he replied.

"You are well acquainted, then, with the vicissitudes of an adventurer's life."

"I am, doubtless."

"And this life has its charms for you?"

"Quite as many, probably, as the desert had for Ishmael, or as the land of Nod for Cain. No matter where, or in what, I find the elements of my happiness. It pleased me to come here. — I came."

I understood well the hint contained in this rejoinder; but I was not disposed to let him off thus.

"You had no particular object in quitting the haunts of civilization, and coming hither?" I said, looking him steadily in the face.

"Yes, I had an object in coming here. You will ask me next what that object was."

"That is the very point toward which I was verging," I answered.

"And that is the very thing I shall not tell you," replied he, firmly. "Were I, in turn, to ask you all the questions you have put to me with so much ease and assurance, what important facts should I become the possessor of?" he added, after a little hesitation, and in rather a sneering tone.

"You would learn, sir, that you are in the society of a gentleman; that his name is Hartley Ferguson; and, furthermore, that he is on a tour to the Rocky Mountains."

"And for what?" exclaimed the stranger, with more interest than he had hitherto exhibited.

"That is a subject upon which I cannot be very explicit."

"For the good reason that you don't know, yourself," retorted the stranger.

"Exactly. But perhaps you can tell me," I said, ironically.

"Yes, I could tell you more of your own heart than you dream of, and of your objects also. But I will not. Go and see how you'll prosper. Imagine, if you will, that no one can penetrate your motives (if you have any); that you have no enemies, no obstacles to overcome; that the future is spread out smooth before you, like this prairie."

The stranger said this in a more serious tone.

"I like the 'plain language.' I was never good at enigmas. I am too well taught to allow any person to gain an ascendancy over me by mysticism, and the assumption of knowledge which cannot in the nature of things be his," I rejoined.

The stranger's face grew darker. The heavy brows gathered a deeper frown.

"Young man, you don't know what you are saying, or whom you are addressing. I am not in the humor for jesting, and I seldom jest; badinage will do for fools, but not for men. I have said nothing but what you have provoked me to say; and, I will add, nothing but the truth. I did not question you — you questioned me; and now you coolly denounce me as a pretender — an impostor."

He paused. Then, drawing his fine figure erect in the saddle, and fixing his eyes sternly upon me, added, in a deep voice,

"Look at me; scan me from head to foot; do I look like the miserable charlatan you have called me? Can you read impostor in a single line of my face? If you say you can, you utter a vile calumny. Do you suppose a man created in God's image, gifted with a living soul, and breathing the free air of these vast plains, prairies and mountains, could become the petty pretender you have represented me to be?"

The bold, noble bearing of the man, his dignified yet impetuous language, all combined to produce an effect in his favor.

"I confess," I answered, "that you have the seeming of a man of honor; and, were it not for the knowledge you have assumed to possess in regard to myself, I would make your quarrel my own against any odds."

"Well, we will not bandy words. It is of little moment to me that you believe, or disbelieve; but with you it is not so. It is important for you to believe what I tell you; that is, if I see fit to tell you anything. I said I knew more of you than you dreamed. I *do*. Whether the knowledge I possess will be of any use to you, let the future reveal. I do not wish to alarm you, but —"

"I am not alarmed."

The stranger bit his lips, and proceeded.

"I do not wish to alarm you, but there is danger near, the nature of which is unknown to you. I doubt if you have a knowledge even of its existence. I fear I am speaking to faithless ears; but time determines all things, — let it decide this. I shall see you again. We shall meet often — often when least expected by you. Perhaps you will lay aside a portion of your pride, and feel that you need me. Whether I am a friend to you or an enemy, I shall not tell. Be assured I am one or the other. I am an earnest man. I am either hot or cold. Upon any subject worthy of my thoughts, I am never indifferent. There are but very few things in this world which I meddle with. I am not within the pale of the world you have just left. I care nothing about it, because I am cut off therefrom, and don't wish to mingle with it again. I ask no questions in regard to the lives of other people, and wish them to observe the same silence in relation to myself. I think I render myself intelligible. I warn you to look to your safety and the safety of those with you. We part now. You will not have time to forget me before we meet again."

The stranger bowed, and before I had well recovered from the surprise occasioned by his words, he was far away.

On the evening of the 23d, the following was written in my journal:

"Evening. — We are encamped on the North Fork of the Platte. On one side the prairies, with their countless acres, stretch out like the open sea. The winds come creeping softly over them to play solemn dirges in the low pines and the stunted oaks that grow by the water. The music is low and wailing, and fills my heart with memories of the olden time. I am dreary, restless, and my thoughts are incoherent; they wander away, and then return, — return to Madeleine Leroy. Yes, my heart is full of Madeleine. I can conceal it no longer from myself; but I will not write the word that trembles in the ink-drop upon my pen. For the present let it be unwritten. It is enough that it is written in my heart.

"But this stranger! Who is he — whence came he, and what is he to me? This is another mystery! Who may say it shall not make another chapter in my history? But this is absurd; my curiosity is too easily aroused. I am growing weak, credulous — But I will forget. The human will is omnipotent (so they say), and I *will* away my memory.

"He said something of danger. I must look to it; no evil must come upon these maidens. Would that I had questioned him, as oracular as he seemed. But I was too proud to do that. To-night I must be wakeful. Yonder I see the object of my solicitude; she smiles, she beckons to me, and I go."

* * * * *

Pondering upon these things, I wrapped myself in my blanket, and, placing my saddle for a pillow, resolved to be wakeful.

I remember keeping my eyes open for a time, and gazing upon the stars; finally, the stars seemed to twinkle dimly, and go out like an exhausted candle. Then the figure of Silver-Knife sitting by the blaze appeared to grow indistinct and fantastic, until it was a dark, undefined object, having no outlines but darkness.

I remember being aroused from a pleasant dream by the discharge of fire-arms, and loud shouts. I have a confused recollection of springing to my feet, of a terrible shock, and nothing more. When the dark, dense shadows rolled back from the brain, the sun was shining. My obscured sight grew clear. I put my hand to my head. My hair was saturated with blood. I raised myself slowly to a sitting posture, and looked about me. No person was in sight. I was alone. Scattered around me were tokens of fight — an arrow-head, a hatchet, a splintered ramrod, a pistol broken from the stock, and a savage stark and stiff.

With a vague idea of the calamity that had befallen me, I arose to my feet. The baggage-wagon was where I last saw it, but most of its valuables were gone. One of the mules I saw grazing at a short distance, and, a little further, Wyandot.

Where were my friends? was the query that pressed itself upon me with overwhelming force. Alas! the answer was but too evident.

I threw myself upon the earth, and a full sense of my wretchedness and desolation came home to my soul. All my buoyancy of spirit, all my hopes of the far-stretching future, all the freshness and elasticity of youth, seemed gone. I begged for tears, but they would not come. O, no! I could not weep, though my eye-balls were burning. There is solace in tears, though it be unmanly to weep.

CHAPTER VIII.

WICKLIFFE.

I AROSE and looked to the sky. The sun had performed three hours of his diurnal journey. I had given way to unmanly weakness, and sat down to lament, when I should have girded my loins for action.

I went down to the river's bank, drank deeply of its cool waters, and washed the red stains from my matted hair. My thoughts took a more natural tone. Something tangible in relation to what I ought to do stood out before me.

I now looked about for something to strengthen and invigorate my outward man; not that I felt the gnawings of appetite, but because I had a purpose to fulfil, and wished for strength to accomplish it.

I found enough dried buffalo to answer my purpose, and, having swallowed with some effort my simple fare, I was sitting upon the earth indulging yet one moment longer in the luxury of sorrow, when a sound caused me to look up.

The stranger, whom I had met and parted with the night before, stood near. He was holding his horse by the bridle, having approached unheeded.

"I told you we should meet again before you had time to forget me," he said, calmly.

A sudden thought crossed my brain, and I acted upon it as suddenly.

Approaching the unknown, I laid my hand quietly upon his shoulder; but my quietness was significant of a fixed purpose. With my right hand I pointed to the smouldering camp-fire, and the deserted camp.

"Do you know aught of this?" I asked, looking him sternly in the eye, while my voice was thick and hoarse with contending emotions.

"I see what you see," he answered.

"Do not evade me. To-day I am not in a mood to be trifled with. It would have answered yesterday, but it will not now. Your language of last eve leads me to suspect you."

"Of what?" asked the unknown, in the same unmoved tone.

"Of foul play," I answered, tightening my grasp upon his shoulder.

"In short, that I incited the Indians to attack and scalp your friends, I suppose you mean," he added.

"I do mean that."

"Then you wrong me, for I did not."

There might have been something of bitterness in the manner in which he uttered this, but there was also much of earnestness, and something else which I could not understand at the time.

With an exclamation of contempt, I pushed him from me, and turned away.

"Stay!" said the unknown.

I paused.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked.

"You say you understand my movements; why do you ask? You are the very man, of all other men, who ought to know all about it," I retorted, with a sneer; but he stood calm and quiet.

"You probably intend to find the Indian trail and follow it. Did you ever follow an Indian trail?"

"No, I never did," I answered, mechanically.

"How, then, can you expect to succeed?"

This was by no means an unreasonable question, and I made no reply.

"And, providing you should follow the trail, and come up with the Indians, what would you do then?" the stranger continued.

I was still silent.

"You would probably be killed and scalped before you had time to say your prayers."

"What would you have me do?" I asked, doggedly.

"I would have you be a man. Be prudent, cool, resolute, and by no means refuse the help of a strong arm and a practised eye."

"Where shall I find the strong arm and the practised eye you speak of?"

"Both are here," replied the stranger, pointing to himself.

"But I care not to trust you. I am suspicious of you. Where the intention is good, there need be no mystery. I hate mystery."

"No matter if you do. Get your horse and prepare to go on the long and dangerous trail."

"Then you really intend to bear me company?"

"I do, although it is likely to prove a thankless piece of business. See! your fine animal is grazing quietly yonder, and the sun is far up. Remember, every moment spent in inaction is a moment lost."

"First tell me your name," I replied.

"Wickliffe; you may know me by that name. Now get your horse."

I am naturally a reflective person. The storms which crush the spirit, and bow the stout heart, pass quickly over, leaving me calm as a statue, and unflinching as iron. Could one look into my soul, he would still find traces of the tempest; but upon the brow, and in the eye, he would discover no sign.

It was thus with me at that crisis. The sudden evil that had befallen me and my friends had prostrated me at first, but two hours of reflection restored my manhood. I was strong, if not hopeful, and I will not say I was not even hopeful; for hope clings to one in every extremity. I was now ready to act, as well as think.

It was evident (to me) that the catastrophe had been brought about, not by the Indians solely, but by the instigation of a white man.

I had several reasons for this belief. If it had been the work of savages alone, my friends would have been killed, and scalped on the spot; or, at least, such would have been the fate of some of them.

The females possibly might have been spared, but that was extremely doubtful, as they did not scruple to imbrue their hands in the blood of both sexes.

Where were Silver-Knife, Leroy, and Basil? If they were slain, where were their bodies? If they were living, why did they desert me? The Indians might have commenced the attack so suddenly that the females had been captured before a blow had been struck, and I had been awakened by the first alarm. My friends, seeing me fall, and supposing I had already departed on the trail of death, pursued the flying foe to rescue the captives. All this looked reasonable. I felt quite sure the whole affair had been planned and executed by a white man, with a view to get Madeleine and Mary into his power.

A white man had undoubtedly participated in the other night attack, as the severed finger would attest.

The next query that arose was, who is Wickliffe? Can he be trusted? If he had not had the usual number of digits, I should have said no; but he was not deficient in that particular.

Although there was something about the man which marked him superior to deceit, I resolved to watch him. Wickliffe looked like a true man, and I could not but confess it to myself.

Influenced by motives which I could not fathom, he had volunteered to guide me on the Indian trail—a very difficult and dangerous mission.

He took the lead, as if he was to be the principal actor, as a matter of course. The trail, at first, it required no great sagacity to find, for the imprint of horses' feet upon the prairie-grass was very legible, bearing away to the right of the Platte.

Our progress was not very rapid, as Wickliffe had to dismount often, and lead his horse by the bridle, in order to be certain that we were on the trail.

"Some of your friends are on the trail, for a certainty," said he, as he examined attentively the horse-tracks.

"How can you tell?" I asked.

"By the iron hoofs," he replied.

I examined the ground, and the imprint of a horse-shoe was distinctly visible.

"It is evident, at any rate," added Wickliffe, "that your friends' horses have gone this way, whether they were in the saddle or not. But it is my impression that they went of their own accord, and as free men; for in many places I notice that the iron tracks are not on the trail, as they would naturally be had they been prisoners. Instead of following its windings, they take a straight course, and come upon it at the next sweep. No person but an old trapper could do that, or, rather, would run the risk of doing it, for one inexperienced might lose the trail altogether."

This was cheering news to me. If Silver-Knife, Leroy, or Basil, or all of them, were in pursuit of the victorious party, I had much to hope. In that case, cunning and ability were happily united. Few backwoodsmen could hope to succeed where they had failed. We traversed the wide prairie during the day, and encamped upon it when it became too dark to see the trail. Our preparations for camping did not

require much time. We gathered a few dry limbs, kindled a fire, ate our hunter's fare, and wrapped ourselves in our blankets. Our beasts fared better than ourselves, for the grass was abundant.

A night on the open prairie is lonely enough under ordinary circumstances, but in the situation in which I was placed it was rendered doubly so. The hours rolled solemnly away, and sleep refused to visit my eyelids.

The one idea of Madeleine in danger was ever present with me. I pictured her in every variety of suffering. I saw her in the power of savages, toil-worn and bleeding. I saw her dragged forth for the torture. I saw the lurid flames licking up her blood. And then I beheld her in the power of a disappointed and remorseless libertine, perhaps the very person I had seen at St. Louis and Westport.

You can easily imagine, with all these fancies crowding through my brain, my dreams were few. About two o'clock I sank into one of those slumbers in which the mind loses but half its consciousness.

I was aroused by Wickliffe, who shook me by the shoulder.

"You have been groaning in your sleep for the last hour," he said. "The sun is rising. It is time we were on the way."

Our breakfast of buffalo-meat was soon despatched. A smart ride of three hours took us off the prairie into a country broken by hills and ravines, studded with oak, cottonwoods, birch, and walnuts.

The difficulties of the trail now commenced. The Indians had probably covered their horses' feet with buffalo-skins; and the iron hoofs of my friends' animals could be no longer seen.

We were now at fault. The trail lost its individuality, and scattered in all directions. This was a device of the Indians to avoid pursuit.

"Your friends lost the trail here, or adopted the Indian plan, and wrapped their horses' feet in buffalo-skins," said Wickliffe, who never appeared at a loss to account for everything he saw. It was now that he evinced his deep knowledge of Indian character. No object escaped his attention. A stone displaced, a spire of grass trodden down, a bent twig, were sufficient to mark the trail. But at first, with me, these things passed unnoticed. By noon we reached a spot where the Indians had evidently camped.

"I think they must be a war-party of Crows," said my companion. "The place which they selected for their lodge, and the manner of building a fire, makes me pretty certain on this point. If I am right in my conjectures, their course is towards the Big Horn river."

The cautions of the pursued party increased at every step. About four o'clock in the afternoon, after toiling up a long hill, we descended into a deep valley, traversed by a brook of considerable width. The trail had been growing fainter for the last hour, and we now lost it altogether.

For a moment Wickliffe was at a loss; but when he perceived the brook his countenance cleared up.

"Ah! I see how it is," he said. "They have taken to the water."

He now informed me that this was a stratagem frequently adopted by war-parties to baffle pursuit, and that they often walked in the bed of a brook, or shallow stream, several miles, being careful not to disturb the stones or weeds at the bottom, or splash the water upon the banks. I had read of such things, but did not really think they were true, — now I was convinced.

Wickliffe directed me to cross, and follow upon the opposite bank, while he went forward upon the other. By observing the signs, we hoped to discover when the trail left the bed of the brook. We dismounted, led our horses, and walked on in silence for an hour, without finding any signs of a trail. Wickliffe now crossed the brook.

"Here is grass," he said. "Our beasts are hungry. Let them feed here, and I will go forward while you watch them."

CHAPTER IX.

A PANTHER.

I HOBbled the horses, and sat down beneath a sycamore while Wickliffe went on. I was very weary, and my eyes were heavy for want of sleep. The monotonous murmur of the brook, the leaves sighing in the soft wind, the birds sing-

ing in the trees, soothed my senses, and lulled me into a slumber.

From my deep sleep I was aroused by a noise at my side. Upon opening my eyes, the two horses were crowding close to me, as if for protection, while they trembled in every joint. I looked about me, but could see no cause for alarm, and concluded they had been frightened by some animal while feeding at a distance, and had not yet recovered their spirit.

The sun had just settled away behind the blue ridges of the distant Sierra, and the time of twilight had come; and a soft, dreamy, mellow twilight it was. It was to me just what I had pictured an Italian sunset. But little time was allowed me to please myself with such an illusion, for my attention was again called to the strange conduct of the horses.

They pressed as near me as possible, while their expanded nostrils, glowing eyes, trembling limbs, and low neighs, attested extremest fear.

I now began to be sensible there must be a cause for such demonstrations, and mechanically followed the direction of their fixed eyes with mine. Heavens! I saw a sight which sent the blood tingling through my veins as if it had been commingled with atoms of ice. Standing upon a branch of a large sycamore which grew on the opposite side of the brook, was one of those animals so dreaded by all, and so terrible to Indians, — a panther, large as a tiger, fierce as a hyena.

It will be impossible for me to forget the sensations that overpowered me at that moment, though they were not of a nature to explain and dilate upon.

The eyes met my gaze like two living coals set in a seal of darkness, and emitted burning sparks. I saw the hissing jaws open, and a tongue like a heated iron thrust out. There was that peculiar fury and malignity leaping from the cat-like visage that tells of a purpose too fixed and deadly to be diverted or delayed.

I tried to summon all my firmness, to look back his hate without flinching. The power of my eye appeared to arrest him in the act of springing. He turned and walked back and forth on the limb, with quick, nervous, restless motions, lashing his sides with his long tail, and uttering low, threatening growls.

At length he came out on the limb toward me as far as possible, and stood still, save a slight wavy motion of the tail, and a quivering of the lips. I knew enough of the nature of the animal to be aware that he was preparing to spring upon me. It was a fearful moment, and the poor dumb Wyandot participated keenly in the intense interest thereof; but the panther did not make the fearful leap. He turned and walked back once more on the limb, as if on purpose to tantalize and keep me in horrible suspense. After this act of bravado, he assumed his former attitude, looking more threatening, if possible, than before. His back was gracefully curved, and every hair appeared to stand erect, while he gradually and slowly settled back upon his haunches. I knew what that meant, and brought my double-barrelled rifle deliberately to my shoulder. There was a single white spot upon his breast. It was a beautiful mark, and I levelled the "sights" down to it with a calm hand.

I fired, and the next instant was prostrated by a huge, hairy body, which came against me like a gigantic ball. With loud snorts, the horses ran away as fast as their hobbles would permit. Though somewhat stunned, and confused by the shock, I gathered myself up as quickly as possible. The panther lay at my feet in the last spasm of death. I was standing beside the quivering mass of flesh when Wickliffe made his appearance.

"That was well done," he remarked, in his usual unmoved manner. "You exhibited nerve worthy of an old trapper."

"What makes you think so?" I asked coolly, quietly blowing the smoke from the empty barrel, as though nothing more than ordinary had happened.

"Because I saw it all! My rifle has been levelled on that animal for the last three minutes. If you had not fired when you did, I should have saved you the trouble. The panther is the most fearful animal on the prairies, save a Camanche or a Blackfoot," replied Wickliffe.

Upon measuring the animal with my ramrod, he was found to be about thirteen feet from the tip of the snout to the end of the tail.

Wickliffe assured me it was one of the largest-sized American panthers.

"Well, what success?" I asked. "Have you found the trail?"

"No, but I have killed a buffalo, and brought away his hump in triumph; so, with your consent, we will kindle a fire, and test our gastronomic powers."

We soon piled a heap of fagots, and a cheerful blaze leaped up. I ate with a better appetite than I had felt for the two preceding days; for a buffalo hump is a delicious morsel for a hungry man.

Wickliffe was more companionable than usual. A portion of the chilling reserve which had characterized him hitherto seemed forgotten; but he was still dignified, mysterious, and self-possessed.

That was one thing I had against him—he was too self-possessed. It was annoying, and gave me a feeling of inferiority, to see a man so calm and self-reliant on all occasions. It appeared like one's setting himself up for more than he was worth.

But that night Wickliffe was modified and mellowed down to something like an equality; and that, too, without any effort. In short, nothing, apparently, cost him an effort.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW CHARACTER.

WHEN I awoke, Wickliffe was standing near, regarding me with an expression so singular, that I could not but observe it. The habitual frown had softened down into sadness, and traces of emotion were visible upon his face.

He turned quickly away when he perceived I was conscious of his scrutiny, and his usual sternness returned.

"Then he is not a man of iron," I exclaimed to myself. "He has his moments of relenting and human weakness. But why that strange look—why that softening of the hardened lines upon the brow?"

I asked these questions, but there was no person but myself to answer them. That I could not do, and the mystery remained.

My journal of the 20th has the following note:

"To-day we have followed the trail with much difficulty. It has required all the sagacity of my new friend to distinguish it at all. The savages have scarcely disturbed one blade of grass in their flight.

"Wickliffe seems dubious, and thinks we may be nearer the war-party than we really imagine; but I am not back woodsman enough to determine. My heart is full of the image of Madeleine. How madly I have loved her without being conscious of it! I know now why I came hither. I did not understand my own impulses; but now all is plain as sunlight.

"I am impatient of this slow march; it is but a snail's pace at best, and I cannot brook it. I sometimes imagine that Wickliffe is lagging on purpose—that he does not mean I shall rescue Madeleine.

"Once I was on the point of telling him so; but I met those calm eyes of his, and forgot my purpose. He smiled too, as if divining my thoughts."

On the night of the 26th we built our fire at the base of a long ridge of hills. We had strained every nerve to get forward, but probably had not travelled over twenty miles that day. Being so well mounted, and having no baggage to encumber us, we could have made twice that distance, had we given ourselves no trouble about the trail.

Scarcely had our fire begun to blaze, when a visitor unexpectedly made his appearance. He came stalking up to us, with his rifle on his shoulder, with a swagger and a nonchalance worthy of a prize-fighter.

His figure is worthy of some description. In stature he was very short, but was amply indemnified for that oversight in nature by thickness. His shoulders and chest were remarkable for breadth.

His head was set upon said shoulders without regard to neck; and, probably, a trapper in that wild country could get along just as well without a neck. He was certainly a greasy, hairy-looking specimen of human flesh. He wore a greasy fur cap, a greasy buck-skin coat, greasy leggings, greasy moccasins, to which you may add a greasy mouth and beard, and, in short, greasy everything.

He was just the man to subsist on raw flesh; and, when necessitated, could eat an Indian without salt. Such, at least, was the impression his appearance was calculated to make.

The rifle which he carried had the same greasy look in which he luxuriated—was very heavy, and of the largest calibre; it would carry a half-ounce ball. His hunting-knife was very long, and its edge was sharp enough, no doubt.

"Wah!" he articulated, bringing the breech of his rifle

violently to the ground, and peering at us through his shaggy eye-brows; then added immediately,

"Any grub?"

Wickliffe signified that we had, and produced a portion of the buffalo he had shot the night previous.

The adipose man seated himself coolly by the fire, cut a stick from a fagot, and sharpened the end. Slicing off a monstrous piece of the meat, he thrust the stick into it, and held it over the blaze, with great apparent satisfaction, and perfect self-possession.

When about half done, or, to speak more to the point, when about warmed through, he commenced eating it voraciously, without a word. The secret of his greasiness was soon evident.

When he had satisfied, in some degree, the demands of his gastric region, he began to show premonitory symptoms of sociability, by wiping his mouth with his coat-sleeve, and sundry startling yawns.

"How are you, white folks?" he said, looking at us with the air of a man who suddenly and unexpectedly finds himself better.

Wickliffe assured him that we were in the enjoyment of good health, which fact seemed to relieve him very much.

"Got any of the weed?" he asked.

"Don't use it much, but always carry it," replied Wickliffe, offering a generous quantity of the filthy drug.

"That's said like a Christian," replied the greasy man, proceeding in silence to fill a villanous-looking pipe.

"How's peltries?"

"Don't know—care nothing about peltries," said Wickliffe.

"Ugh!"

Here a vast column of smoke curled out of the greasy man's mouth.

"How is bufferlers?"

"Care nothing about buffalo."

More smoke.

"Sent out into these parts by Government?"

"Care nothing about Government, either."

"How's Injins?"

"Can't find them—am on the trail."

"Been stealin'?"

"Yes."

"Horses and mules?"

"No, women."

"Old women?"

"No, very young."

"Harnsum?"

"As handsome as ever the sun shone on."

"Con-sarn their red skins!" cried the stranger, grasping his rifle in one hand, and his ruffianly knife in the other.

"May I be trodden to death by wild bufferlers, if some of 'em don't lose their fakilities for that before the Injin corn gets growed! Young and harnsum gals! Confound the red niggers! If it had been old women, whose sands was e'namos un out, it would seemed a little kinder different like; but young gals is another thing. Them's jest my feelin's. Con-sarn 'em!"

"You speak like a philosopher," replied Wickliffe.

"You're sure they're young gals?" continued the trapper, without heeding the remark of Wickliffe.

"I know it," said Wickliffe.

"My dander's risin' like a yeast cake; and them sort is so scarce here, too. I don't know but I shall exterminate the whole race o' painted niggers from the face of the airth. I have been vegetatin' in these diggins a little more than a long time, and I reckon I've rubbed out more on 'em nor I have bufferlers.—and bufferlers are mighty plenty hereabouts. You can't scarcely stir a step without startin' more nor less. A good sprinklin' of the varmints in this here region call me the 'Grizzly Bear,' and I reckon they'll call me more nor that afore they see the last on me, unless I stick my toes up sooner than I kalkilates."

"What does he mean by stickin' his toes up?" I whispered to Wickliffe.

"Dying," he replied. "It is a cant phrase often used by such people."

Perceiving the "Grizzly Bear," though rough in exterior, was a man to be trusted, I related to him all that had happened to my friends and myself. His interest increased when he heard the name of Leroy.

"I've knowed that man for these dozen years. His heart's bigger than a bufferler's. It'll jest about break up his constertution to lose his gals in that unchristian way. Now, I'm

a rough man and a great sinner; but I an't intirely without nateral feelin'. I know that my ways an't altergether pleas-in' and perlite, and all that; and I *am* a great deal like a wild Injin, that's a fact; and there is considerable grease and stuff of that natur' on my huntin'-shirt; but may-be there is a leetle good left in me yet. When I sees a feller-cretur in distress, or knows he's in distress, there an't a man on the trail that would put out his hand to help him quicker nor I would, although I says it myself, when perhaps I had n't oughter. I would n't valley sendin' a half-ounce ball through sev'ral of the nateral varmin of this uncultivated sile, for old acquaintance' sake."

"Which way are you from?" asked my friend.

"From the nor'-west."

"Seen any signs of Indians, or whites either, in that direction?"

"Reckon I have. I crossed the trail of some of my color no longer ago than this mornin'. Yesterday I see one of the varmin, an' if he had n't a-taken himself out o' range mighty sudden, he'd been likely to have lost his fakilities — his mem'ry in perticerler. And, come to think on't, I picked up this bit of cloth and put it in my pocket, because it looked kinder femernine like."

Here the trapper produced a small strip of stuff, of a curious fabric, which I recognized as being a piece of a dress I had seen Madeleine wear.

I snatched it hurriedly from the hand of the stranger, and would have pressed it to my lips, had I not seen the eyes of Wickliffe fastened upon me.

"Prehaps you's in a great hurry to git that piece of figured stuff, mister; you an't a goin' to swaller it, I presume." And then he added, addressing himself to Wickliffe, "I hope he does n't allers take things in that onharnsum way. I'll bet all my peltries that that youngster's got a hankering arter the gal as used to wear that strip of stuff."

"A pretty strong one too, old fellow," rejoined my friend.

"Where did you find this?" I asked.

"Away in that direction, about half a day's travel," answered the trapper, pointing to the north-west. "That is to say, about half a day's journey for Camanche."

"Camanche is your horse, I suppose?"

"Yes, I call him Camanche, because he used to belong to a Camanche brave, who suddenly lost his fakilities and tumbled off his back. Fine animal — tougher nor a bufferler — swifter nor an antelope. If I whistle, he'll leave his grass and come directly. It's my opinion you don't often catch a free trapper without a hoss."

"Take us to the spot where you found this piece of stuff, and I will reward you handsomely," I said.

For the space of a minute the trapper smoked away fiercely, without reply.

"Prehaps you don't know me," he said, at length, "and prehaps you don't want to. A great many people in this world judge a person by the way he looks outside. If he's got on an old coat, and leggins rather the worse for wear, they set him down as nobody; but, on the contrary, if he looks slick and nice, they say he's somebody. But that an't my way. I don't mind how a man looks, providin' allers he's all right inside. It's the intarnal arrangement that makes the man. That's *my* religion; and it's a kind o' religion which you think I don't know nothin' about. I don't believe in hiring a chap to do his duty; and it kinder goes agin the grain to have a person offer to reward me harnsumly for tryin' to rescue a feller-cretur from the savages, especially when that feller-cretur is a femernine. Them's my feelin's."

I perceived at once I had made a great mistake. Instead of the unfeeling and unprincipled man I had expected to find hidden in those soiled and unseemly garments, I had stumbled upon a real diamond, though rough and unpolished. How we deceive ourselves by judging by appearances! I hastened to repair my error.

"Pardon me, my friend," I said; "I have done you some injustice. As you say, it is not right to judge one by the cut of his coat, or the quality of its material. I perceive your heart is precisely where it ought to be. The sentiments you have uttered are worthy the proudest potentate."

"I don't know nothin' of potentates; I should n't know one from a pertater; but I do know somethin' about nateral honesty, and the nateral religion of the heart. So, don't talk no more about hirin' me to go arter Leroy's darters, that are dearer to him nor all the world beside. I'll stake all I'm worth, — and that an't much, — that there an't an hour in the day when his heart an't ready to break; and he stands six feet and two inches in his stockin's."

"Enough — here's my hand. We will be on the trail before the morrow's sun has shone upon it five minutes."

"Here's a hand on that, and prehaps it an't a very smooth one; but it's seen real sarvice in its time, notwithstanding, and is allers ready to grow rougher in a good cause."

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNKNOWN.

My journal of the 27th discourses as follows:

"The strange trapper has kept us company all day. His name is Sutler, and he is perfectly at home in these wilds. Wickliffe seems to puzzle him, and he is obviously at a loss what to make of him. It is quite evident he did not expect that a person who appeared so much a gentleman as Wickliffe possessed such an accurate knowledge of the country and Indian practices. He had thought to find a man fresh upon the prairies, whereas Wickliffe is not. When we set out this morning, Sutler took the lead, and issued his orders like an old general; now, things begin to change their aspect; he consults Wickliffe, and gives his opinion with more caution.

"Sutler has designated the spot where he found the piece of stuff. Both he and Wickliffe affirm that there are two trails, which occasionally intersect each other. One of them, we believe, must have been made by our friends; and to me there is joy in the thought. To-morrow we are resolved to follow what we suppose to be the white trail.

"Wickliffe is calm and distant, as usual. Nothing appears to work any change in him; he is either above the common whims of mankind, or scorns to acknowledge them.

"It is twilight; we have taken our evening meal. I feel an irresistible desire to be alone, where I can think freely, without the searching eyes of Wickliffe being fastened upon me. I shall take my rifle and walk quietly away."

A few stars twinkled in the skies, as I walked slowly from the camp, and the moon came up lazily, lending a softer hue to the night.

Leaving the ravine where our fire blazed, I ascended a long hill, which, rising in gentle swells, attained, at last, a considerable altitude. The black walnut, the poplar and the maple grew in clusters upon its sides; but a liberal growth had been denied them, for the soil was not favorable to their full development, or the prevalent fires of that region had scathed them.

I did not pause in my walk until I had attained the summit of the hill. With a feeling of freedom, for which I am at a loss to account, I stood there alone in that solitude. I could now commune with myself, undisturbed by the strange gaze of Wickliffe. But why should I commune with myself? What new hope should I teach my heart to feel? What unknown philosophy could I gather from the breath of the mountain air? Could I think of Madeleine more calmly, with less distraction, with more stoicism? Would my spirit feel more of the "touch of joy," or less of the agony of woe?

I turned my fevered eyes upon the newly-risen moon, in the state of mind I was then in, I knew no such word as danger; — I had forgotten it; my thoughts were raised infinitely above it. I scorned the thought of peril; was as careless of the future as I was dissatisfied with the past. With feelings like these, I threw my rifle across my arm, descended the hill, and stalked moodily toward the dim outlines of the men, revealed by the light of the fire. My movements were silent, like the ghosts of the departed, when they flit among the graves at midnight. No inadvertent step gave warning of my propinquity: and, at the distance of a few yards, I stood erect and looked into the faces of the strangers. There were two — one an Indian, but the other belied his garb, and was not.

I knew his features — they were too deeply impressed upon memory to be forgotten, however much they were changed with paint and Indian finery; it was the same sinister face I had seen at St. Louis and Westport, though shorn of its hair. For a moment I stood stupefied with this strange and unlooked-for discovery. My first impulse was to raise my rifle and shoot him through the head, and I never had a steadier hand than when I brought the sights to bear upon his frontal bone; but I changed my purpose, even when my finger was upon the trigger. What should I gain by killing him,

was the question that pressed itself home upon my conscience, and stayed my hand. Nothing, — and perhaps I may lose much, was the answer which reason gave.

A knowledge of his movements would benefit me more than his death; a single moment's reflection convinced me of this, and I brought my rifle once more to the hollow of my flexed arm, with an inward regret that I could not carry my first impulse into execution. His right hand was wrapped in a cloth; and, if I had doubted before in regard to the severed finger, I doubted no longer. The lurking enemy, the author of my misfortunes, was before me, without question. With a strong effort, I walked away to a considerable distance from the fire, and traced, as well as I was able by moonlight, the following lines upon a blank leaf in my pocket-book.

"Unmanly schemer! your movements are watched; you cannot stir a step without the knowledge of one who only delays your punishment for purposes of his own. Do not think to escape, or flatter yourself with success. You know what this means, and why you deserve to die. When you lay down you may be sure that the pull of a trigger may send you to your last account. An unerring barrel has been levelled at your head this very night, and may be at the precise moment when you are reading these lines. I could have slain you much easier than I have sent you this note of warning; but your time is not yet — it will come sooner than you will be ready; let that suffice; so lie down and sleep calmly to-night, if you can."

Tearing out the leaf on which I had written these lines, I fastened it to a small stone with a strip of my handkerchief. When I had done this, I retraced my steps noiselessly to my first position near the unknown, and, bending forward, cast the stone so that it fell at his feet.

With an exclamation of surprise, both seized their weapons; but the white man's eye had caught sight of the paper. Casting a suspicious glance around him, he stooped, took it from the ground, and commenced reading the lines.

A change came over him as he read: he was no longer the swaggering ruffian of a few minutes ago. He seemed to shrink and grow smaller as he held the bit of paper in his hand; appeared stupefied, uncertain, and undecided; cast hurried, nervous glances around, as if expecting a shot from an unknown agency. Once or twice, apparently, he was upon the point of rushing away to meet or shun the danger, and then the hazard and folly of such a step restrained him.

Thus tossed with fear and uncertainty, he threw himself down with his face to the earth, and felt, probably, what the guilty only can feel. Satisfied with what I had done, I was walking toward the spot where blazed the fire of my friends, when the tall figure of Wickliffe suddenly stood beside me.

"You here?" I asked, with a start of surprise.

"Yes, I am everywhere. What did you write on that paper?"

"You saw me, then?"

"Of course I saw you; what is there I do not see?"

I repeated to him what I had written.

"That will do very well; if he is a coward, he will suffer more to-night than if you had shot him through the head, as you thought of doing in the first instance."

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"As long as you; what course do you think of pursuing in relation to the white man and the Indian?"

"That is a subject which I have not fully considered. I crave your advice. The former knows more of the fate of my friends than we do, I have no doubt. He is the man who gave me the letter at St. Louis, of which I have spoken."

"Since you have asked my advice, I will give it. Shoot the red-skin, and take the white man alive. If he knows aught of the Leroy family, we can wring it from him by fair means or foul."

"I don't greatly like the idea of destroying the poor Indian," I replied. "He is but an instrument in the hands of a designing man, and we can expect nothing better of him. What would the death of that miserable wanderer avail? Nothing; it would be like slaying the starving wolf merely because he is a wolf, and not something better."

"Not so," replied Wickliffe. "If he escapes through our mercy, or inability to capture him, he will bring scores of his tribe upon us before we have accomplished our object. If he dies on the spot, no word goes to his people of his end or our movements; and we have only one prisoner to look after, instead of two. Indians are proverbially a slippery race; cold lead only can keep them from getting through one's fingers."

"I think we can manage them both," I answered. "With

Sutler's assistance, it will be an easy matter to make them prisoners."

"Well, let it be so," rejoined Wickliffe.

At that moment we were joined by Sutler, who had also seen the fire. I explained to him the condition of things as well as I could; but it was with difficulty I could restrain him from shooting the Indian. "There was such a good chance, and it was so much like an act of mercy."

After further deliberation, we decided to forego, for the present, the idea of capturing them, and, instead thereof, follow and watch their movements so long as we could do so successfully. This was more in accordance with my views, for I believed it presented a better prospect of success, and I wished to play with the guilty fears of the unknown. It would give me a stern joy to be near him by night and by day, and be a witness of his ceaseless, corroding vigils, his sleepless anxiety. Having formed this resolution, Sutler took it upon himself to find and dispose of their horses. They were found hobbled at no great distance. They suffered themselves to be approached without difficulty, and were soon in our possession. This was no wanton act; the safety and success of our plans required it. Were the objects of our suspicion permitted to retain their horses, they might elude us; but on foot we could follow them.

Sutler wrapped the feet of the captured animals in buffalo skins, and rode them away to a considerable distance. Wickliffe and myself stationed ourselves in a growth of sycamores at the base of the hill I have mentioned, to watch the movements of the parties by turns, until morning.

The unknown and his red friend were greatly mortified at the discovery of the loss of their horses. Knowing it would be vain to spend much time in looking for them, they struck off in a north-westerly direction, toward the White-Earth river. We followed them at a safe distance for two days, while Sutler kept in the rear with the animals. A portion of this time they kept the trail, which we had been tracing with so much trouble; and at other times they left and crossed it again, after several hours.

My journal of the 29th reads as follows:

"For the last forty-eight hours we have traced the footsteps of the unknown with untiring assiduity; he has not been an hour from our sight. It is evident that he suffers; his manner is ever restless, and his eyes wander continually over the prairies and hills, as if in momentary expectation of meeting misfortune. He is never at ease, is nervously impatient to get forward, — feels that he is watched, his steps dogged by those who wish him no good, — makes no fire at night, and would no doubt travel during the hours of darkness if his strength would permit. He is probably straining every nerve to overtake his Indian accomplices. * * * * *

"We have again crossed what we believe to be the trail of Leroy and Silver-Knife. What a piece of good fortune it would be to overtake them!"

"I still dwell upon the memory of Madeleine, and cannot cease to hope; but what can she be to me, even if we succeed in wresting her from the power of these wild men of the wilderness? In vain do I strive to teach my heart a new philosophy. There is no philosophy for the affections; they are as uncontrollable as the winds. Those sick of life, or too old to enjoy, may talk of philosophy, but not the young and hopeful."

"30th. — As soon as it was light this morning, we discovered that the Crow (the white man's companion) had given us the slip. Wickliffe looked disappointed and serious, and said it boded no good. I suggested the propriety of pursuing him on horseback, and trying to cut him off; but Wickliffe shook his head, and remarked that he was far beyond our reach. To-night we are resolved to make a prisoner of the unknown, as nothing is likely to be gained by putting it off longer. The disappearance of the Indian causes us much uneasiness. We consider our position a very critical one. If the Crow camp is not at a great distance, we shall have visitors before long. My ill-timed clemency has endangered our whole enterprise. I am ready to shoot myself for my folly. What can we do with this white man, if we deprive him of liberty? He will only be an incumbrance; but we may at least learn the fate of the Leroy family, though even that is doubtful. * * * * *

"We have crossed the White-Earth river, and are reposing upon its bank. This is the third river we have crossed since leaving the Platte. What will be the end of these wanderings? * * *

"I have been low-spirited all day; my mind is filled with foreboding; evil is near — I feel it; every whisper in the

air assures me of it. Perhaps my end is near, and these are but premonitory flashes of what shall be; but what does it matter where I fall? There is a time and a season for all things, saith the preacher. If there is a time to laugh and be merry, there is a time also to die. Who is ready for that season? Is it thou, of woman born? Then lie down in the dust without a murmur, and let the worm cover thee. Alas! though tired of earth, we turn with no eager eye to heaven.

* * * * * The unknown is a prisoner at last, — is silent and sullen. No threats can wring from him any knowledge of the Leroy. He is a man of powerful frame, and struggled fiercely when seized. He is by no means fresh upon the prairies. I have seen his wounded hand, and one finger is indeed gone. If he knows aught of Madeleine, he shall divulge it, by heaven! I cannot and will not bear this uncertainty much longer. I hope he may not tempt my mood too much, for I wish not to have the blood of a fellow-creature upon my hands without good cause. I dare not trust myself to question him, for fear my impetuosity may get the better of my prudence. Let me remember it is a terrible thing to dismiss a human soul from its clay tenement to its God; because there is no repentance in the grave, and the spirit shall return no more.

* * * * * I intrusted my papers and other valuables to Wickliffe; and all for the forebodings mentioned in my journal. He received them more graciously than I had expected, although it was obvious to me that he felt no little contempt for the proceeding.

"You will probably think this a piece of folly," I remarked, as I handed them to him.

"Far from it," he answered. "This is not the first transaction I have known of the kind."

"Tell me about it," I said.

"There is but little to tell. I was hunting in the vicinity of the Blackfeet country, with an old guide by the name of Williams. He had been a dweller in the wilderness for many years, and possessed an accurate knowledge of woodcraft and savage habits. He had just enough of the French blood in him to make him gay under every kind of privation. His spirits never flagged, and his good humor could not be outdone. But one afternoon his gaiety vanished of a sudden; his brow grew thoughtful, and his face became serious in its expression. The song and the joke no longer passed his lips. I could scarcely suppress a smile at his woe-begone visage.

"What is the matter now?" I asked.

"I don't know exactly," he replied, "but I kinder think I'm wanted."

"Wanted where?"

"Up there," he answered, pointing solemnly to the skies.

"Going to die, you mean?"

"I feel something in here" (putting his hand to his breast) that kinder tells me I shan't trap a great many more beaver. I reckon as how I'm bound to another sort o' huntin'-ground, where the streams are flowin' with the waters o' life. But it's doubtful to me whether I taste o' them delicious waters. They warn't made for the like o' me. You know I've been a wicked, swearin' man, carin' for nobody, although it may be nobody cared for me. I never had much trainin'. My father was somethin' of a Frenchman, and my mother was an out-an'-out squaw, and p'rhaps they won't expect much from such a cast-a-way child o' natur."

"Nonsense!" I said; "nothing but a fit of the blues. Cheer up, now. A buffalo hump will set you all right."

"We have eat a good many bufferler humps in our time; but we shan't never eat no more o' 'em together. In course, I may be wrong, and these feelin's may wear off; but I don't believe they will. I've got a few things in my pocket which I want you to take, and, if anything happens, they are yours. Here's a few bank-notes, and some other things, which would n't be any good to me, if I should get my quietus from one o' them savagerous critters."

"To please the old trapper, I took his bank-notes, &c., thinking it was but the cloud of a moment.

"One hour from that time we stood on the summit of a hill. The guide was leaning on his rifle, looking mournfully at the setting sun. I saw him wipe an unusual moisture from his eye, and cross himself. He seemed in the act of turning to speak, when the sharp report of a rifle rang out upon the air. The guide tottered, smiled, fell, and died without a struggle. I bent over him an instant, but there was no sign of life, and I attended to my own safety by hastening from the scene. His scalp hung that night, no doubt, in the lodge of a Blackfoot brave."

This tale had a contrary effect from what might have been expected. It aroused my pride; for it appeared to me that he had devised the story on purpose to play upon my fears.

"I will take back my papers," I said, coolly, as soon as he had finished.

"O, no!" he replied, quietly, "I want to read them, by and by. I have no doubt but they give a fair and unprejudiced history of your progress in the Indian country."

"Well, keep them; but my mood has changed, and I care nothing about it. I am subject to the blues; but they are gone now, and I am all right. To prove my words, I am going to take a stroll up the river."

"No, don't do that!" he said, earnestly. "I expect we are in a dangerous neighborhood, and none too safe when all together."

"I am no coward, Wickliffe, and I really don't intend to run into danger. But, since you have told me that story, I shall go out, merely to show you I do not heed it."

Whistling a favorite air, I shouldered my rifle and marched leisurely away. Though I was thus calm outwardly, I was not easy at heart. Thus far I had not been very successful in my exertions to rescue the maiden Madeleine. I had followed the trail for a number of days, and was now no nearer my object than at first, and perhaps further from it; for the escape of the Crow would warn the marauders of pursuit, when they would either send out a war-party to exterminate us, or take good care that we should not effect our purpose.

What now could be done? We had taken what we believed to be the party most deeply implicated in the transaction; but what should we do with him? He was sullen, and refused to give us any information. The letter, which I had good reason to believe he had written, was still in my possession. As I thought of the threats and taunts contained therein, and the malignity with which he had dogged our footsteps to do us evil, my passions rose to an ungovernable height. I felt my heart beating tumultuously, and the veins swelling like cords upon my forehead. My eyes were burning, and my face was hot and fevered. I stalked back, and stood before the unknown with a scowl of defiance upon my brow. For a moment I contemplated him, and then motioned Wickliffe and Sutler to withdraw.

They did so.

"We are alone," I said, sternly, drawing a pistol from my belt. "There are a thousand miles of wilderness between us and the marks of civilization. If a human being perish here, what bird will fly with the news, over the woods and over the wilds, to call for retribution?"

I paused to give my words time to take effect. The man's cheeks grew pale; he knew I was dangerous.

"I have a few questions to ask, and your life depends on the answers you make," I continued. "What are you called?"

"O, you want an introduction," he replied, rallying, and putting as good a face upon the matter as possible.

"What are you called?" I repeated, in the same tone.

"Well, if you insist on knowing me, my name shall be Burrill, at your service."

"Let it be Burrill, then; perhaps in an hour hence you won't need a name."

"But you surely don't mean to assassinate me? O, no, you are facetious — you intend it as an excellent joke; but jokes lose their edge, you know, when carried too far; and the law, you know — the LAW —"

"Don't waste your breath before the time; you will want it all before long; and breath is precious sometimes, especially toward the close of one's life."

I drew the crumpled letter from my pocket, and held it before his eyes.

"A very fair specimen of chirography," he said, at length, with affected composure; but his voice trembled.

"Did you write this?" I resumed, emphasizing the words deeply.

"Why, really, sir, you are inquisitive and impertinent withal," he rejoined, with the same desperate effort at calmness.

I cocked the pistol, and held it about six inches from his head.

"I shall not repeat the question," I said. "If you do not answer, and answer truly, you die on the spot. Don't lie to me, for I do not wish your blood on my hands."

I know I must have been a fearful object as I stood before him, with my flushed face, my set teeth, compressed lips, flaming eyes, and veins like knotted whip-cords.

"I don't deny an agency in that; but, my dear sir, it was all a joke — a mere joke, nothing but a joke —"

"I have another question to ask, of the utmost importance;

and I charge you, as you value life and the repose of your immortal soul, don't hesitate to tell me correctly. But first look at this dismembered member; it is the one you lost."

I had preserved the finger in a small bottle of brandy, and now produced it. The effect upon him was obvious. His face gathered a deeper pallidness, and his bravado spirit seemed stricken down and humbled. He perceived that I had a chain of evidence against him, and that a flat and unqualified denial of all knowledge of the Leroy would do no good, and might be productive of the worst of consequences.

"Where is Madeleine Leroy?"

He hesitated, and trembled from head to foot.

"You are a devil!" he muttered.

"Yes! I am at this moment; and have some of the devil's own work on my hands. You perceive, I presume, that this dangerous weapon is cocked and levelled at your right eye. A slight pull of the trigger—it is a hair-trigger, and my finger is on it, and I am rather nervous—would send a leaden messenger crashing through your head."

"This is too cool and blood-thirsty!" cried Burrill, shutting his eyes, horrified at the prospect of death. "Take away that devil's plaything!"

"I shall not repeat a question three times; you know what I require. This minute is yours; the next shall be mine."

"Your question is too hard. What should I know of the persons you name?"

"Remember the letter, and the threats it contains. You do not deny the authorship of that. This weapon, you see, is very near—the least carelessness——"

"Hold! stay your hand. The two maidens are unharmed; they are now with my friends."

"Who are your friends?"

"The Crows—and I saved their lives. They would have been slain immediately——"

"No lies! no lies!" I cried, stamping furiously upon the ground. "Let me read from your letter. Listen! 'Your hope shall be like the deceitful mirage which tantalizes the thirsty traveller upon the desert waste with the hope of water.' And again: 'You have not sufficient stamina to contend with that influence which will continually be exerted against you.' I know that 'influence,' and have felt it, and you shall learn if I have strength to struggle with it. Whither have the savages gone with the maidens?—make a clean breast."

"That I know not. Ask something that I know."

"Harkee, Burrill! Hear you the howl of the wolf that prowls about the camp? It is hungry for blood; its gaunt frame is pinched with famine; it eats human flesh. Were you left dead here to-night, there would not be two joints of your frame together by to-morrow's sun."

"Horrible!"

"Very true; but you have forgotten to tell me where your Crow friends have gone?"

"To the Black Hills, son of Satan!—now release me."

"Release your spirit, perhaps; but not your body. What was the fate of Leroy?"

"He perished—I could not save him."

"You save him! Cease to blaspheme the truth. So the wolf saves the lamb, and the hawk the chicken; so the vulture seizes carrion, and feeds upon the choicest dainties; so the fox forgets his cunning, and the snake to crawl upon its belly on the ground."

I laughed savagely, and my laughter seemed to terrify him.

"I believe you are deceiving me about Leroy," I continued.

"If you are, remember you are in my power, and, if I discover your duplicity by any circumstances which the future may develop——"

"I tell you, he perished."

"Well, let it be that he perished—all must perish. What was your object in abducting the maidens?"

"I deny the charge."

He was sitting upright upon the earth, for his hands did not permit him to assume a standing position.

"Take that for your hypocrisy!" I shouted, and dealt him a stunning blow upon the head, which laid him senseless upon the ground.

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTIVITY.

As I walked away and left him, I saw a purple stream welling from his temples. I passed Wickliffe and Sutler without a word, for it may be easily imagined that I was not in a mood for words. They saw my excited manner, and suf-

fered me to go my way without question. I felt the need of cool air, for it seemed hot and suffocating where Burrill was, as if he had rendered it so by his presence. I believe the breath of one villain will create an atmosphere foul enough to sicken a dozen honest men. I met the balmy winds that came sighing down the river, and they were as grateful to my burning brow as a bath of cold water to him upon whom the fever-demon has laid his scorching fingers.

Just before me was a high bluff, one of many such. Upon the water side it arose perpendicularly to the height of thirty or forty feet. It resembled those rocky headlands I have seen upon the sea-shore. I mounted to the top of this bluff and seated myself where I could look down into the waters of the White-Earth. I sat there and watched the stars as they came out, one by one, to gem the diadem of night, and my brain teemed with thought. As I listened to the voice of Nature, while she spoke through the winds, and the birds, and the running waters, I grew calmer. Aided by the gentle moon and her satellites, I took out my tablets and wrote, or attempted to write, lines like the following. I cannot recall them, word for word, because they were lost; and, indited at that hour, could have been scarcely intelligible if preserved; but the overtaken mind seeks anything for employment.

"I have been angry—it may be, cruel; but what I have done was for the sake of Madeleine. I have solved the mystery at last, and the ruffian's name is Burrill. I shall compel him to lead us to the maidens. He begins to know me for what I really am. The wicked are ever craven-spirited. * * * Madeleine is unharmed. It is possible I may see her again.

* * * But why these forebodings? I thought they had passed, and given place to more manly impulses. * * * It is hard to tell what new mood I may take. The imagination is a wayward thing. Perhaps I shall become a disciple of Don Quixote, and believe in enchantment and other extravagances. * * * I need sleep, and this relapse into the *dismals* may owe its origin to that. * * * Very mild is the night. The air is cool and balmy, and the breezes seem to chide me for my moodiness. The nightingale is singing his song, and the waters flash and sparkle far down below me. * * * Has Burrill seen and spoken to Madeleine? Has he insulted her with offers of love? Why was he away from her? Time perhaps will show. Good angels defend the restless Madeleine and the calm Mary! May the time when I can strike a blow for her——"

I was interrupted—a hand was laid upon my shoulder. I sprang to my feet—a painted warrior stood beside me.

"White man walk woods," he said, meaning that I was his prisoner, and should go with him. For a reply I planted a blow between his eyes that stretched him upon the ground.

But that was only the commencement of my trouble; another was upon me before I had time to recover myself. He was a strong fellow, and I was likely to have the worst of it. I had incautiously left my hunting-knife, and now felt the want of it bitterly; for I perceived the Indian was trying to get his from his belt. Resolving not to die alone and unavenged, I concentrated all my physical powers, and, lifting him in my arms, leaped from the bluff, and we went whirling down the dizzy height. I had no thought but death—I did not expect to escape; but the waters proved deeper than I had thought. I arose to the surface after a terrible plunge, still held by the nervous arm of the Indian. Grasping him firmly by the throat, I held his head under until his hands relaxed their hold, and the limbs straightened out; then pushed him from me and swam to the shore, faint and exhausted. Meanwhile the brave upon the bluff had recovered from the stunning blow I had dealt him, and now sent forth his shrill war-whoop, which was answered from the adjacent wood by a hundred savage throats. My rifle and revolvers, also, had carelessly been left at the encampment. I had only a brace of common duelling-pistols in my belt, and they were now rendered useless by their recent drenching. If I could not fight, I must run; and so I made the attempt, but it was only an attempt, for I was hemmed in on every side. Despairing of escape in that way, I threw myself down upon the earth among a growth of ferns and reeds in the hope that I might happily be overlooked.

I had scarcely assumed that position when I heard the terrible voice of Burrill, and felt my case was indeed a precarious and hopeless one. The Indians had released him unquestionably, and he was inciting them to vengeance. I reproached myself bitterly that I had not slain him on the spot, and that through my means his Crow friend had been suffered to escape to bring his people to destroy us. They came very near, and I heard them pass on every side. I was

in an agony of suspense, and prayed fervently that my fate might be decided quickly. Not the least painful thought was, what will become of the Leroy family, in case of my capture? Once the tide of dusky figures rolled away in another direction; but it speedily swept back again. And Burrill came also, foaming with rage, exhorting the Crows to activity, and to look behind every tree, and beat every bush. Several times he passed so near my hiding-place that I could have touched him with a yard-stick, or dashed my pistols in his face with but a slight exertion of the arm. I will not assert that I was entirely composed; or that I did not feel a sickly, painful anxiety in regard to the result. I should have been something more than human not to have experienced sensations of a character extremely unpleasant, and bordering on the horrible.

I had a presentiment, after I heard his voice, that Burrill would be the man to discover me; nor was I mistaken. He approached the spot where I lay, and his eyes gleamed upon me like a basilisk's. I did not give him time to commence an attack, but, leaping from the earth, knocked him down with a pistol, and ran for dear life. I should have done very well had I continued running; but unfortunately I ran against a Crow warrior, and a rough-and-tumble engagement took place, during which we both rolled over and over an infinitude of times. I succeeded finally in getting him beneath me, and freed myself from him by dashing his head against a stone several times with all my strength, which I have reason to believe deranged his mental faculties more than several touches of the nightmare! As I continued my flight, I saw Wickliffe and Sutler in the distance fighting like lions; and they were not alone. I heard the crack of a rifle that sounded like old "Iron-sides," and a war-cry that reminded me of Silver-Knife; but in that moment of excitement I was by no means sure I was right in my conjectures; and the bare possibility of being right gave me a thrill of pleasure.

Alas! I was not destined to join them. A blow from a tomahawk laid me low. I know little of what followed immediately; there was a period of darkness without any darkness within. The world, and all I had known, or felt, or feared, were lost in that darkness. When my senses once more became connected, I was lying on my back. I felt a painful sensation about my wrists and ankles, and perceived that I was bound hand and foot. The sound of conflict had nearly ceased, though a random shot occasionally told that it was still going on at a distance. I was not alone; a Crow warrior stood near me, with weapons in his hands. His vigil was quite useless, for I was bound so thoroughly there was but little prospect of escape. He was soon joined by others. My feet were unbound, and I was ordered to march. There was no alternative but to obey, and I followed my captors. We had not proceeded far before Burrill made his appearance; and a most unwelcome appearance it was. He wore an expression that boded no good. I did not deign to notice him, and gave no sign that I knew he was near. The dark scowl upon his face gave place to a derisive laugh as he approached.

"Well, Ferguson, you are on your last march!" he said triumphantly.

I scorned to answer him.

"You will never walk over this ground again. Every step takes you nearer to your grave. Let me quote a little to you. 'If a man die here, in this wilderness, what bird will fly to call for retribution?' Isn't that poetical?"

I made no reply.

"You said something about wolves which I cannot remember; but you may rest assured they will not eat so much as a joint of your frame. Do you understand that?"

He paused for an answer.

"Silent are you — silent as an Indian? I shall teach you to speak. What think you of Madeleine Leroy?"

I was still mute, although my blood boiled to hear him speak the name of Madeleine.

"Would you take Mary for Madeleine? Jacob took Leah for Rachel, you know. I should be willing to make almost any sacrifice for you, we are such good friends."

I longed to strike him upon the mouth; but I could not — my hands were bound.

"What would you like to have done with your ashes, Mr. Ferguson? Anything I can do for you, in their final disposition, will give me pleasure. What kind of fagots should you prefer for your funeral pile? Some have a choice; one prefers hard wood, another soft, a third pitch-pine, and a fourth birch-bark. Shall be happy to oblige you — have a great assortment of combustibles."

He paused again.

"Perhaps you leave all these matters to me, and trust to my experience and better judgment; you could not do better I shall not fail to attend to these little preliminaries, like a faithful friend."

Another silence.

"I suppose you know you are not alone in disgrace? The sight of a friend will raise your spirits, no doubt; and here he comes."

I turned suddenly at these words, and my eyes rested upon the noble figure of Silver-Knife. He was a little in the rear, and bound like myself. He was singing his death-song in a clear, ringing voice. It had a wild and startling effect upon me. He told of the exploits of his fathers; of his people; of his own, and the vengeance his tribe would take upon their enemies.

CHAPTER XLII

DOOMED.

THREE hours' march took us to the Crow encampment. During that time I had exchanged no words with Silver-Knife. He had manifested no surprise at seeing me, and noticed me only by a slight movement of the head. Our entry into the camp was hailed with a terrible clamor by the women and children. Insults of every kind were offered us. Squaws reviled us, and naked children made wry faces. We were firmly secured in the lodge of one of the chiefs, and it was a consolation to have my fellow-prisoner near. He bore his misfortunes with true Indian dignity. In the native pride of his character, he soared far above the malice of his captors. A warrior was stationed near the door of the lodge, and we were left to our reflections for the remainder of the night. Once, Burrill looked in to see if all was secure, and went away apparently highly satisfied with what he had seen. I now had an opportunity to converse with Silver-Knife.

"What know you of my friends, and how came you hither?" I asked, quickly.

"The maidens beloved by the pale medicine man are prisoners."

"Where are Leroy and Basil?"

"They have been on the trail of the Crows, and the war-chief has been with them."

"Why did you leave me?"

"We thought the medicine man was dead. Our hearts were heavy; but we could not stay. The Crows were bearing away in triumph the wife and daughters of Long Rifle. To do good to the living, we left the dead, wishing him a pleasant journey to the happy hunting-grounds. We have dogged the footsteps of our enemies ever since. To-night they attacked your camp. We heard the sound of firing. We hastened to your assistance, and heard news of you. They told us you were in danger, and perhaps at that moment a prisoner. We fought desperately. Many of the enemy fell; but there were too many to contend with. We retreated step by step, fighting as we went. I was at last overpowered and taken prisoner. My hours are numbered; the red warrior will die."

"You will not die alone. I shall perish with you. These demons are merciless; they will burn us. And, even were they disposed to mercy, that white fiend would change their mood."

"Bad man is the snake in the grass. He is the child of *Machinito*, the bad spirit. But you must die like a man. Do not shrink from the smoke when it stifles, or the fire when it burns. Sing your death-song, and tell of the warriors you have slain. Let them not call my white friend a squaw. You have been brave in battle. The mighty in war have fallen before you. Death is a journey to a better land. The tortures of a day will be forgotten in the happy hunting-grounds. We shall not die there, neither shall we make war any more with our enemies. Nobody weeps there; and all faces shine with happiness. The fields are very green, and the trees never grow old and wither. The game abounds, and we shall pursue it through a country very beautiful and pleasant, whose delightful verdure is eternal. We shall not stumble upon the graves of our fathers in hunting, for there are no graves there. No sun shines there, for the smiles of *Monedo* will give us light. Sparkling rivers are there, whose waters impart everlasting youth and freshness. Who

would not dwell in that country? We will journey together to the pleasant land, where the shadows of our fathers are."

"But Madeleine! Who will pluck her away from the hand of the destroyer? How can I die and leave her in danger?"

"Monedo is the father of the helpless and innocent. He will make her his care. Perhaps he will take her by the hand and lead her from her enemies, or you may meet her in the hunting-grounds of our fathers. Do I not leave children? Do I ask who shall care for the Morning Star and the Singing Bird? They are very dear to the red man's heart; but he fears not to trust them with the Master of Life."

"It is hard for the young to die before they have scarcely tasted the cup of life."

"It is better to die young than to die old; for the old grow dotting and foolish, and are remembered as children. The young man passes away in his strength, and is remembered as one comely and brave. The aged are like the old and withered trunk, fit only to lie down in the dust. They shake and tremble at every breath that blows. The young man is like the young sapling, whose fibres are tough and strong. He can die with more courage, and leave a great name. His people mourn his loss, and youthful maidens shed tears to his memory."

Why dwell on the remembrance! At the instigation of Burrill Silver-Knife and myself were doomed by a council of Indian braves to death at the stake. * * * * *

Bound with thongs of deerskin, we awaited the morrow, that we might die. No hope of rescue; the encampment was full of warriors. The day rolled away, and I tried to reconcile myself to death. I thought of my sins, and prayed that God in his infinite mercy would forgive. I knew it was the eleventh hour; but even that hour is not hopeless, and very few think seriously of death before that time.

I thought of the words of Holy Writ, and regretted I had not made them oftener my prayer: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." But men seldom number their days. They rather make it a point to think them limitless. When they feel the touch of the hand that is never warm and welcome, the appalling thought occurs for the first time that they must die, and pass into utter darkness. Dark is the grave, but light, bright is the doctrine of the resurrection to the believer.

The night drew on; the last night. The words stunned and paralyzed me. The last night—the very last upon this side of the vast and terrible boundary which is a dread mystery to the living. To-morrow night the moon and stars will shine upon my ashes. Hartley Ferguson will be swept from the face of the earth as completely as if he had never inhaled the breath of life. What, then? Speak! ye who have gone before,—speak from the tomb, from your rottenness and corruption, and tell me what ye have seen, what ye have felt, what ye have suffered, what ye have enjoyed! Speak, I adjure you! Speak, for it cannot violate your fealty to the Imperishable. He will permit this much to one about to die—I know, I feel that He will. Still ye are silent, gods, angels, saints, spirits, all! I rave—I wander; and the soul of the untutored Indian is calm.

CHAPTER XIV.

REDEEMED.

THE sun was setting, when a warrior looked into the lodge where we were secured. I thought little of the circumstance, for many had looked in upon us during the day. I did not heed him for I was endeavoring to fix my thoughts upon heaven, from which they had wandered from childhood. He advanced to the middle of the lodge, and stood like a statue of stone. I gave him no attention. Silver-Knife was chanting solemnly portions of his death-song. The intruder uttered a low, guttural sound. I raised my eyes. A figure tall and majestic, stood near, with folded arms. Could I credit my senses? or was I mad? The face and form of Wickliffe were before me—calm, quiet, unruffled, self-possessed; the same inexplicable being I had met so strangely on the prairies, who had attached himself to my interest in such a mysterious manner. I did not cry out, for my thoughts came quickly, and taught me how to act. An unguarded exclamation might have endangered my friend. In externals, Wickliffe was an Indian. The robe of skins, the leggings, the moccasins, the paint upon the face, the hair, and even the expression, were all in keeping with that character. He held up his finger in token of silence.

"At midnight expect me.—You shall not die.—I will save you!" he said in a whisper, laid his finger once more upon his lips, waved his hand, and glided from the lodge. O! what a welcome visitor was that man of mystery! The words rang in my ears a thousand, thousand times—"You shall not die; I will save you." My breath came, my heart beat once more. "At midnight expect me." Heavenly Father, I thank thee! Thou hast not forgotten me in my low estate.

I exchanged glances with Silver-Knife. Our very looks spoke—spoke of life, of happiness. No, I could scarcely think of happiness; that could be found only in the smiles of Madeleine. My fellow-prisoner might be happy; but not I. The time was past when such ideas filled my heart; the shadow of Madeleine no longer fell thereon. Why should I rejoice at the hope of deliverance, when she was still in deadly peril? Wretch that I was, to forget her an instant in my selfishness! As if I could find pleasure in freedom, or a delight anywhere without her. * * * * * And I to escape, and leave her in the power of Burrill. But stay! I am too fast. I may not escape. Wickliffe may be discovered and fail; and the consequence of that failure will be—will be—death.

Hours and minutes are long when great events hang upon them. When they decide the question of living or dying, each second has a gray hair for the temples and a wrinkle for the face. Burrill came in the evening, taunted and reviled me. He pictured the happiness of himself and Madeleine. He spoke of her as loving him, and scorning me. I remembered the evening when I had taken her hand, and how she withdrew it; and deemed, for the moment, that Burrill spoke the truth, and no lie. He talked of his lodge, and her as the light of it. He knew his words wrung my soul with a strong agony, and he dwelt long on the picture so hateful to my contemplation. After that he spoke of the stake, the fagot, and the fire. I could not resent—I could but hear him. I shut my eyes and let him talk on. When he had ceased through want of words, I spoke to him for the first time since I had been in his power. I mastered myself, and spoke calmly also; yes, calmly, for the WILL is omnipotent when it awakes, and shakes itself like a lion, and clothes itself in strength.

"Burrill, I will speak to you, perhaps for the last time. I am, it appears, very near death; and I will speak as a dying MAN, and not as a dying CHRISTIAN. Hear me and tremble, for cowards always tremble at the truth. I am now so near my dissolution that my words must be to you like the words of inspiration, and as such you may regard them."

My voice was very deep and solemn, for I meant to intimidate and awe him. He was startled at my manner.

"Burrill, you are a villain, and a murderer. You have betrayed the innocent, as Judas Iscariot betrayed his Master. The price of blood is upon your hands. To-morrow-night it will cry from the ground where my ashes repose, and you will hear the cry. You will never sleep soundly after that. That cry will be ever in your ear, louder than ten-fold thunder; and I also will be near you. You shall see me scorched and blackened, as I soon shall be. The spectacle will be too terrible for you; it will fill you with horror. The time shall come, if this deed be done, when you would give all your hopes of salvation to bid me live. I will haunt you till I drive you mad; but I doubt if you ever live to go mad, for something speaks within me, and tells me your end is near. God will not suffer you to live long to pollute the air. You will pass away in darkness and in blood. Eternal justice will overtake and hurl you to the dust—to the pit—to hell itself! I warn you,—I warn you by God above, and Satan beneath, not to wrong Madeleine Leroy, or her gentle sister."

The ruffian shuddered, and grew pale.

"I will not rest until I have scathed your scoundrel heart with the eternal fires. I will fill your veins with the hissing poison of remorse. I will follow you in dark places; I will terrify you with a burning hand that never shall—"

"Hold! hold! or I shall slay you on the spot!" he cried, and rushed from me, as if the curses I had invoked were already taking effect.

"A small heart has the snake in the grass," said Silver-Knife.

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth," I replied.

A minute had not elapsed before Burrill appeared again at the door of the lodge, and shook his clenched hand at me.

"What do you think of the white stranger who promised us vengeance?" I asked of Silver-Knife.

He had the look of one who would come to us through blood and water. There was decision in his movements, the

pride of the eagle in his eye, the firmness of an Indian upon his lips. He is brave."

"Then you have met him before?"

"I have; and who can see and forget him? He scorns danger; he laughs in the face of death."

"Where have you seen him?"

"I have seen him upon the hills, and in the valleys; on the prairies, and on the high mountains; and he was always the same. If I told him of danger, he smiled; if I told him to fly, he frowned. He is too proud to tell his thoughts to strangers, especially to the Indian. The Indians know and fear him; they never seek—they shun him. Yet he has influence with some of the Indian tribes; but he scorns to exert it."

"Such is Wickliffe," I answered. "You have described him well. But he has a heart—a soul; I respect—I love him. He has been near to save me in the hour of peril; he has hovered about like an angel of beneficence to shield and bless me. I know not why it is thus. I cannot fathom him—he is too deep for me; and I have kept my eyes open at night to ponder and weigh his actions. Yes, he will come—come to snatch us from death." * * * *

One of the skins of which the lodge was composed was lifted, and Wickliffe glided in. Silently he severed our bands with his hunting-knife, and put arms into our hands. How my heart bounded with joy when I felt my "revolvers" once more at my side, and my limbs free! Our deliverer beckoned us to follow, lifted again the skin, and glided from the lodge as silently as he came. We imitated his movements, and stood once more in the open air, armed and free. With a start of alarm, I saw half-naked figures stretched sleeping upon the ground. We held our breath as if the very motion of it would awaken them, and walked unchallenged and unnoticed away. In a few seconds we were in a dense thicket. I saw several dark forms approaching, and laid my finger upon the trigger of my revolver. But that caution was useless; they were my friends, tried and true. I should have recognized the tall form of Leroy in any place. His friend and companion, old Ironsides, was by his side. He looked grim and forbidding. I shook him silently and fervently by the hand, and then greeted Sutler and Basil in like manner, for those persons were indeed present.

I felt thankful for my escape. Kneeling down beneath the moon and stars, and bowing my head in my hands, I poured out my gratitude in the ear of the Almighty. Yes, I uttered a prayer of thanksgiving, and wept tears of gratitude.

When I arose, the heads of all present were bared, and tears trembled on the lids of Leroy.

"And now for Madeleine!" I exclaimed.

"What would you do?" asked Leroy.

"Save her, or perish," I replied, sternly.

"I'm going on that service myself," he answered.

"And I also," added Wickliffe.

"And I," said Sutler.

"And I shall not stay behind," said Basil.

"Two's enough," continued Leroy. "More would endanger the whole affair. And if we don't succeed, why, I am sure, two's enough to die by the hands of them heathen cretters."

"There's my feelin's," said Sutler, "and I'll be the man as'll go into the camp of the Philistians."

"No, that I shall not permit; if there is danger, I will dare it. Death by torture is horrible; but I do not fear to die fighting like a man, and in a good cause," I added.

"We have no time to waste," said Wickliffe. "The Crows will soon discover the loss of their prisoners, and then adieu to the thought of rescuing the family of Leroy for the present. I am expecting every instant to hear the sound of hellish clamor from the encampment. What we do, let us do quickly."

"The man of the big heart has spoken well," said Silver-Knife, who had hitherto been silent. "I am an Indian; I have been reared in the wilderness, and know well the habits of the red men. I am best fitted to perform the dangerous business you talk of. Let the pale medicine man have his way; he is brave and trusty. We will enter the enemy's lodge together, and his knife shall sunder the bands of the prisoners like flax. The Big Heart, and the Long Rifle, and the others, shall be near to help us, in case of a surprise. Has the Indian chief spoken wisely?"

"There is wisdom in the words of our red brother," replied Wickliffe. "We will not disregard them; but it is necessary that I should go and lead the way. I know the lodge where the captives languish."

"Let it be so, and God prosper you!" said Leroy, fervently. "But first you must put on the Indian toggery, and paint."

In five minutes I was transformed, so far as externals went, into a Crow warrior. My hair was drawn to the top of my head tight, and tied with a string; after which it was ornamented profusely with feathers. My face was painted by Silver-Knife in the most approved style. When this was done, a robe of skins was thrown over my shoulders, and my toilet was soon completed.

CHAPTER XV.

BURRILL AND MADELEINE.

SILENCE rested upon the Crow village. The moon and the stars were shining brightly in heaven, to light the wanderer upon earth.

With steps that made no echo, we traversed the borders of the wood that skirted the encampment. The lodge was at the extremity of the village. Wickliffe pointed it out to us.

"Now imitate me," said the war-chief, leading the way. Stooping until his tall figure was nearly double, he gradually and noiselessly advanced.

Like a fox exerting his cunning to baffle his prey, like the panther that gives no warning of his approach, like the serpent creeping in the dank weeds, we neared the unsuspecting foe. We were very near the object of our hopes and fears. The guide beckoned us to stop. We did so, and he went forward and put his ear against the lodge. No enemy was in sight. We had approached the lodge in the rear, and, if a Crow kept guard, it was upon the other side.

After a little pause, Silver-Knife motioned us to approach. We went forward, and stood by his side. Voices came to our ears from within. One was the voice of Burrill: could I hear it anywhere upon the face of the wide earth, and not recognize it? I had heard him speak but a few times, and yet every note, every intonation of his voice, was graven upon my memory, as by the hand of the Master of Life. It was to the mind what branding the flesh with a hot iron would be to the body; it had left its mark, to endure forever. Thus the tones and features of some men become obnoxious. Had I met him under any circumstances, I could not have loved him. I should have repulsed and drawn myself away from him. We were natural enemies. We could not have been friends. I do not judge always by the face, and indeed, did I not see the face at all, I should either like or dislike; for the presence of a human being invariably affects me agreeably or disagreeably, and makes me a friend or otherwise, as the case may be. Animate bodies, like inanimate ones, act upon each other. The good exert a good influence, if they do not speak; and the bad, if they are dumb, exert a bad influence. The human soul, like mercury, is affected by whatever approaches it; but it affects, also, whatever it approaches. In the presence of some people, my heart is hard and stern, and I feel no love or sympathy with my kind; in the society of others, I change, and a thousand bright thoughts have birth, and I feel like blessing the whole world.

The guide pointed to a small opening in the lodge. I looked in. By the light of a smouldering fire I saw four persons—Madeleine, Mary, Madge, and Burrill. The latter was standing in his usual attitude, his arms folded upon his chest, and his chin resting almost upon his breast. The captives were seated upon the ground. The mother held a hand of each.

"Then you are still obstinate," said Burrill.

"I reject your conditions," replied Madeleine.

"Have you considered well the subject? Are you prepared for the results?" added Burrill.

"Considered! No! It needs no consideration," she retorted, rising to her feet with grace and dignity. "Such a subject is beneath my consideration. Trouble me no more; I am resolved. I am a Leroy; you cannot change me."

As she stood there and stretched out her hand, I saw a string of dressed deer-skin depending from her wrist; her hands had been bound, and the bands were loosened for the occasion. Even Burrill, perhaps, was ashamed to stand in the presence of a woman he had disgraced by bonds.

"You know that Ferguson is a prisoner," he continued.

"I do, if a tongue like yours can be trusted."

"He dies to-morrow."

"You wish to intimidate me!" cried Madeleine.

"Your lover dies to-morrow; it is thus decreed by the

chiefs and warriors. Think you they will retract, and show mercy? Is it in the nature of a Crow to be merciful?"

"Did you speak of mercy? Stop, and let the wolves that howl in the desert talk of gentleness, and the hyena of kindness. Stop, and let every vile thing talk of goodness, and every mean thing of greatness."

"I have not told you all yet," added Burrill, calmly.

"Can you save him?"

"I can."

"And will you?"

"No."

"Then the curses of heaven will fall upon you!" exclaimed Madeleine, wildly.

"You can save him," answered Burrill.

"How? Tell me, and I will forgive the wrong you have done — cease to remember my sufferings — even strive to be your friend," she cried, vehemently.

"Become my wife."

"No, that may not be."

"Then Ferguson dies!"

She drew up her figure, folded her arms upon her heaving breast, and was silent.

"I have not told you how he will die."

"Speak!"

"By fire."

"In the name of mercy, let not this thing be! I will kneel, I will sue as a subject sues to a king, I will be your slave, but your wife, never!"

"Madeleine, I love you as one loves his own hand, or his own eyes. Your foolish obstinacy drives me to the last extremity."

Madeleine sank sobbing upon her knees, and hid her face in her mother's bosom.

"Hush, child! be calm, be strong! Our Heavenly Father lives. His arm is not shortened, that he cannot save, nor his ear heavy, that he cannot hear," said Madge. "Do not despair; trust in him. Deliverance may be near. When has been the time that he hath not tempered the wind to the shorn lamb, or when have the righteous been forsaken? Even now there is a whisper of hope in my heart, soft, gentle, as the sweet south-west."

Madeleine was silent.

"My children," continued Madge, "God led the Israelites forty years through the wilderness, and was with them night and day; and while they trusted in him, he delivered them out of all their afflictions."

"Beware what you do," said Mary to Burrill. "The hour of retribution may come sooner than you dream. We are in your power now, it is true; but some sudden turn of the wheel of fortune may change everything. Deliverance may come in the hour of our greatest need. Think you that deeds like yours can pass without punishment? If you do, you deceive yourself. Strong and determined hearts are pursuing you; they will follow you to the death, for vengeance. Will Leroy forget his wife and children? O, no! the lion will forget his whelps sooner! I feel a presentiment that my father is near. I expect momentarily to hear the crack of his deadly rifle. Well may you start at the mention of Leroy. There is a long score of wrongs to settle between you."

Burrill involuntarily glanced about him in alarm, as if fearful Mary's words would prove prophetic. Then, with a sneer,

"Don't trouble yourself about me, Miss Leroy! I have settled a great many old scores in my time, and shall settle another to-morrow."

He turned to go.

"Stay, one moment!" exclaimed Madeleine, starting up suddenly. "Let me shower upon you my bitterest maledictions! The hand of retributive justice will rest upon you, like a mountain of iron. May darkness bring a terror, and day a continual reproach! May your friends forsake you in the hour of need, and your love turn to hatred!"

"Hold, Madeleine, hold!" cried Madge. "Bless, and curse not. That which we give returns again to our own bosom. Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you: hast forgotten, my child — my first-born?"

"Mother, what you speak of is impossible. Would you have your daughter pollute her lips by praying for the welfare of such a wretch? Would you have her prostitute her purity of soul by loving him, even as a Christian? No! no! not that — not that! Rather let me, like David, pray that he may go down quickly into hell, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

"I will depart now," said Burrill, with something of wildness in his manner, as if the evil had already begun to work.

"I will depart, cursed in soul and body, in joint and mar-

row. But you cannot curse me out of existence. I shall live till to-morrow, to punish those who delight to torture me with words. Don't forget, Madeleine; you shall be there at the death."

With a sharp cry, Madeleine sank fainting into her mother's arms, while Burrill walked away. As he disappeared, we heard him speak on the opposite side of the lodge, as if giving orders.

"Stay where you are," said Silver-Knife, in a whisper; then, tightening his belt and unsheathing his hunting-knife, he moved away on tip-toe. As he went, he reminded me of some terrific shadow that falls unexpectedly on one's path; or a ghost, visible to the eye, but unsubstantial to the touch.

By long practice only does the forest wanderer acquire his fitting, noiseless locomotion, when he surprises the watchful foe.

With eyes upon the stretch, as if to see things which do not exist; with nostrils dilated, as if to scent the danger at a distance; with hands put forth, as if he would throw half his weight upon the air; with breath half suspended, as if breathing would betray; with feet that glide like serpents, the red man seeks his prey, by night and by day, in storm and in sunshine, in heat and in cold.

Slow were the movements of the Indian. I watched and strained my eyes after his dim outline, till they seemed bursting with pain. On him alone depended the rescue of the captives. All rested upon his sagacity and coolness. One misstep, one inadvertent motion, or a breath above a zephyr, a cough, the crack of a stick no larger than a needle, the flutter of a leaf, might prove fatal to us and the captives. Imagine, then, if you can, with what intense interest we followed the war-chief with our eyes.

But was he calm and collected? Were his nerves drawn still and tight, like iron cords? Was there any trembling of the flesh, or rebellion of the heart? Endow a statue of bronze with locomotion, and locomotion only, and ask if its heart beats, if its blood circulates, if it thinks. The high qualities of his soul were raised far above the common shrinkings of civilized man.

Wickliffe stood at my side. And what was he then, in that moment of suspense, peril and expectation? Was he the same I had known hitherto? The very same, only stronger, more self-reliant, more terrible in himself.

His head was thrust slightly forward, while the muscles of the neck were prominent and fixed like stone; his eyes were riveted upon the war-chief. The latter gradually disappeared; but we kept our eyes on the spot where we had last seen him. The deadly silence was at length broken by a sound that made me shiver — a heavy, ominous sound, like a falling body, and a knife thrust home to the heart. There might have been a suppressed groan or a cry, but silence came before the ear was scarcely conscious it had been alarmed. Instantly the chief appeared. He held a smoking scalp in his hand, and his knife was reeking. The story was told, a story of death at night. We followed him in silence. Near the door of the lodge lay a corpse yet steaming with its own warmth. The flesh was yet quivering its last adieu to life. Silver-Knife thrust aside the skins that answered the purpose of a door, and, stepping quickly into the lodge, stood erect before the captives. We tarried a moment, to give him time to announce the coming of friends. We heard a smothered exclamation of surprise from Madeleine, and a warning sound of silence from the Indian; and then glided in like spectres. No word was spoken, but hands were wrung in silence, and in tears. My pulses thrilled with delight at the touch of Madeleine; and this time her hand was not withdrawn.

I led her forth into the open air, with a soul brimming with gratitude to God. The others followed with no unnecessary delay; for all felt the need of action, and not of a scene.

Stepping silently over the Crow warrior, with hearts almost motionless, and breath pent up in the lungs, we turned our noiseless steps towards our friends. As we flitted over the ground like midnight spirits, I felt the weight of Madeleine grow heavier upon my arm. She had swooned. I lifted her in my arms, and bore her forward as a miser might carry a treasure of inestimable value. It is often true that persons most quiet and unobtrusive upon ordinary occasions are the most firm and self-possessed in situations of danger. It was thus with Mary; for she was now equal to the emergency. She clung to Wickliffe without a sign of shrinking or fear; and that was a moment requiring all the strength of the strongest soul. Every moment we were expecting to hear an alarm, war-cries, and savage outbursts of anger.

It came, even while Leroy was embracing his lost and recovered ones; wild, loud, startling, clear, terrible as the

watchword of hell. Once, twice, thrice, it pealed out upon the night, and sent a shiver of horror to the hearts of the females. "On!" hissed Leroy, "on!" and on we went. Madeleine had revived, and was now clinging convulsively to my arm for protection, as we hurried along through bush and wood. On we sped, like the poor, belated wretch when the tides of the Solway are at his back, threatening to swallow him up at every moment; on, like the condemned when, breaking from his executioners, he flies from death and the gallows, and hears the tread of the hangman at his heels; on, like one who runs from the leaping flames of a burning prairie, and hears the liquid fire hissing upon his track; on, like spirits escaped from Hades. Fearful moment—moment to appal the hearts of the boldest!

The Crow village rolled out its masses of red fiends. "Whoop! ha! the prisoners have escaped, a warrior lies bleeding, whoop! whoop!" What sounds to come from human throats! The demons might father them, and take pride in it. Above all the din, I heard the voice of Burrill, stern, stormy, loud as a double-tongued trumpet. When the first surprise was over, the savages swarmed away into the woods upon every side, and a hot shower of balls came rattling after us, tearing the bark from the trees, and hastening our footsteps.

"Forward! forward!" said Wickliffe; "the horses are near."

"Thank God!" I exclaimed. "Then you have provided horses."

"I will release your arm," said Madge to Leroy. "I am strong, and old Ironsides has work to do. Children, do not encumber our protectors; 't is your mother that speaks."

"Wa!" said Silver-Knife. "Let them go forward, and we will cover them with our bodies."

"On straight before you," cried Leroy, "and we will give a parting salute to them heathen creatures."

In a single instant the order of march had changed, and the females were flying along before us like startled fawns.

"If some of them varmin don't lose their fakilities, I'll never eat no more bufferlers on this uncultivated sile," said Sutler. "It's rayther my conviction that one or more on 'em'll breakfast on a half-ounce o' lead. Them's my feelin's."

"Be cool! be cool!" exclaimed Wickliffe. "When they are near enough, we will give them a volley; but be careful and don't waste powder. If you see a pale-face among them, riddle him, in God's name!"

"Amen!" I ejaculated. "God send good fortune to every man who puts a bullet through his body."

"Old Ironsides is here," said Leroy. "I want you all to remember that; and, if there's any nice shootin' to be done, I goes in for it. There's nothin like the eye; I do my extra fine shooting in the eye. I don't do it bungling, neither, and an't never afraid to see my work arter it's finished. But hush! I see painted faces and feathered heads. 'T is time to speak to 'em."

An old hunter will bring his piece to his face with astonishing celerity, and level the sights down to the object as quickly. For a moment only was the tall, bony figure of Leroy fixed and motionless; then the fire belched from the throat of old Ironsides, and the sharp, whip-like crack resounded through and through the woods. I know not why it is, but an Indian mortally wounded has a peculiarly strange way of bounding into the air. Following the direction of the flash, I witnessed a performance of this nature on a grand scale; for I saw three, in rapid succession, shoot up into the air several feet, with a smothered exclamation, which merged with the death-rattle; when they fell, they were clods, and clods only. But there is an awfully spasmodic stiffness and unnaturalness about that last, expiring demonstration, that is horrible to think of nights, when the mind is cool. I have seen them since then leap up so in my dreams; but the leap was terribly exaggerated, and more likely a piece of diablerie. We all fired and those who were not struck with balls were panic struck, and for a moment gave back; but they rallied at the voice of Burrill, who took good care to keep out of reach of our rifles. The discharge of our pieces, and the shouts of the braves, told the others, who had gone on the wrong scent that the game was started; and they began to gather round us in a manner that promised our speedy extermination, when fortunately we reached the spot where the horses were left. With pleasure I recognized Wyandot and Camanche. We were soon in the saddle, and moving forward at a rapid rate, led on by Wickliffe, who seemed well acquainted with the country.

"I must give 'em another pill," said Leroy, and sat motionless upon his horse, until a painted face was visible.

"Them's my feelin's," added Sutler.

"Them two cattle won't do no more mischief," added Leroy, as the two came clattering after us, followed by a scattering shower of balls.

We were well mounted, and in a short time the shouts and the shots of the Crows, and the stormy voice of Burrill, died away in the distance. We left them to their rage and disappointment, with emotions of pleasure which it is impossible to describe. I rode by the side of Madeleine. I heard occasionally the murmur of thanksgiving that went up from her pure heart. She was safe, and I was happy; I had been instrumental in her delivery. The morning dawned upon us like a blushing young maiden awakening from her first kiss, in dreams. Soft winds bent the prairie-grass,

"And ilka bird sang o' its love."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PILGRIMAGE RESUMED.

THE metal of our gallant steeds was severely tested before we halted; and many miles of prairie lay between us and the scene of conflict. After some deliberation, we concluded to make the best of our way to Fort Laramie, where we could rest for a few days in safety. We crossed the White Earth, and, making a bend to the left, went forward as fast as possible. After four days' hard travelling, we reached the fort without accident.

My journal of August 10th has the following note:

"I go forward like one in a dream. I can scarcely believe that these strange recollections can be more than confused fragments snatched from my sleeping fancies."

* * * * *

"August 11th. — We are at Fort Laramie at last, and in safety. We are all weary with rapid travelling. We have been very vigilant since our escape from the Indians. No doubt but their spies have dogged our steps, for Burrill is not a man to be baffled. He has a thousand desires to succeed now, where he had one before. We shall have more trouble with him and his allies. We shall join some party of emigrants, if we can, in our future journeyings. There is a long, long way of wilderness before us.

"Wickliffe is silent and distant. He cannot brook a long stay at Fort Laramie; it is too much like going back to the world, and he shrinks from that. Our fair friends suffered much during their captivity. They were hurried forward by their captors with but little regard to their strength. Burrill kept with them for a day only, when he was obliged to slacken his speed and fall in the rear, on account of a wound he had received from Basil. They felt it indeed a relief to be rid of his society, for he had made them wretched with his importunity. The conversations between them it would be useless to repeat. The captives watched for an opportunity to escape in vain, for they were rigorously guarded. The adventures of Leroy and Silver-Knife on the trail were very much like my own with Wickliffe.

"12th. — We are still at Fort Laramie. We see every variety of human nature here. French voyageurs, Trappers, Half-Breeds, Yankees, Englishmen, Mexicans, Mormon emigrants, &c. We shall not go forward with any of them. They are, as a general thing, such a drunken, roistering set of vagabonds, that their room is better than their company. It is hard to know who to trust. There is an Indian here who, apparently, takes a great liking to us. He has been in the habit of acting in the capacity of hunter and guide to parties of emigrants. He says he was with Captain Bonneville during his expedition to the Columbia river. He represents the captain as a very brave and cautious man. He talks also of Fremont; but whether he ever saw either of those persons is another question. He calls himself a Kansas, and his name is Ossawaun—the *Barbed Arrow*. His camp is within gun-shot of the fort. He spends most of his time here. He says he is going as far as Henry's river, to trap beaver. For a trifling consideration, he is willing to go with us as a hunter. Wickliffe does not like him, nor has he from the first. He is an able-bodied savage, and seems to possess all the cunning of his race. Still, there is something about his eye that I do not like. I cannot explain what it is. I dare say it is nothing good; but even a savage should not be judged by his eyes. He may be a very trusty, worthy Indian, notwithstanding his retreating forehead, and the way he has of looking from under his lids. I am inclined to think he will be a valuable addition to our company. To-

day I spoke to the Leroy's about turning their faces toward St. Louis, instead of the Rocky Mountains. They listened to me respectfully, but shook their heads.

"What we have undertaken we will perform," said Madge, with a smile. "Let us hope we have traversed the most dangerous part of the way, and that our future journeyings will be attended with comparatively little peril. With such strong hearts with us, what can we fear? Beside, Heaven has befriended us in such a signal manner already, that we seem bidden to trust again. Ought I not to exclaim, 'I have been in six troubles, yea, in seven, and the Lord hath delivered me out of them all?'"

"And you, Madeleine; what do you say?" I asked.

"I say, let us go on. It is as safe to go forward as to turn back. What should we gain, then, by a retreat? It is true we have suffered, and been in deadly peril, and involved our friends; but that is past, and who shall say it will occur again? My Horeb is yet beyond us, and the Jordan is half passed already."

"What, still firm? Can nothing discourage you? You should have lived in the days of chivalry. Renounce this wild and romantic scheme. Like the recluse who spent his meagre substance in a vain effort to visit Rome, look once more toward the high hills of your Horeb, and then turn your back upon it forever. As you retrace your steps, pray that the goodness of Him in whom you trust may cover and shield you as the cloud did the children of Israel."

"Not so," replied Madeleine, with a smile. "We will rather pray that the cloud and the pillar of fire may go with and guide us to the land of our hopes. Why should we doubt the protecting care of the Eye that never slumbers or sleeps, and the Hand that never wearies in guarding those who trust in Him? But we ask not others to share our peril."

"Madeleine's voice faltered, and for a moment she was embarrassed."

"That would be selfish," she resumed, "selfish to selfishness. But we should grieve truly to part with those who have gone with us thus far, and dared death in our defence."

"Do not fear!" said Mary, with a mischievous smile.

"Madeleine blushed."

"We shall be but too happy to go with you," I stammered awkwardly enough, for somehow the ill-timed remark of Mary embarrassed me exceedingly.

"Mary shall remain," said her mother, playfully.

"Then we shall lose the company of Wickliffe," I observed.

"Shame!" cried Mary, "to retaliate upon a woman!"

"The bird flutters," added Madeleine; "a sure sign that it has been wounded."

* * * * *

"Thus our time passes on pleasantly in friendly intercourse."

During our stay at the fort, Sutler was very amusing. He had much to say concerning "plain" and "fancy" shooting, and kept his listeners in good spirits by his singular drollery. Stories he related without number. On one occasion, when the conversation had taken rather a ghostly turn, and the subject of supernatural appearances was being somewhat sagely discussed, and illustrated by citing examples in point, he related the following, with much comic gravity and tact:

"Talkin' of sperits, reminds me o' my own exper'ence in that line," he said gravely, shaking the ashes from his pipe.

"Let us hear it," I said.

"With the greatest pleasure, Cap'en. My father, you see, had been under the turf a great many years. He wasn't a bad man, by no means; a kinder heart never beat nor his; but he was uncommon fond o' terbacker. He'd smoke the day out and the day in. He had n't an equal in that way, except old Sam Flint, our nearest neighbor, and he was jest about his match; and they used to smoke and tell their tough stories, evenin' arter evenin'; but that was afore my father died."

"My nateral susceperibilities being fine, I felt rayther bad when the old gentleman stepped out. I used to lay awake night arter night, and think on't. One night, in the fust o' the evenin', arter I had turned in, I heard a strange knockin' on the winder-sill, and did n't know what on airth to make on't."

"Who's there?" says I.

"Your father," says a voice.

"It can't be posserble!" says I.

"It's nothin' shorter," says he.

"How do ye like as fur as you've got?" says I.

"I'm not over an' above pleased," says he.

"I'm sorry to hear it," says I. "What's the trouble?"

"It's e'nermost impossible to get any good smokin' terbacker," says he, in a derjected voice.

"That's malanchully," says I. "Can I do anythin' for ye?"

"Nothin' to brag on," says he; "but you'll obleege me by layin' a good piece o' pigtail on the winder-sill, nights, when you go to bed."

"I'll do it," says I.

"I'll feel obleeged," says he.

"Not at all," says I; "but, if it's a fair question, I'd like to know how you pass your time up there?"

"It's no offence at all, sonny. I set on a sunbeam most o' the time, playin' on the jewsharp."

"It must be very amusin'," says I. "Have you got the old thing with ye?"

"I an't got nothin' else," says he.

"Play us up a tune, then," I continued.

"With pleasure," says he; and so he struck up.

"That's rayther malanchully," says I.

"I know it," he said; "but it's all on account o' the terbacker."

"I'll get ye some o' the raal pigtail," says I.

"So do, and I'll play ye somethin' livelier next time. Good-night, sonny," he added, in a more cheerful tone.

"Come agin'," says I.

"You may rely on't," says he.

"Good-night, then," says I. "Don't hurt yerself doin' the misceerlaneous work, and I'd recermend ye to bring a better instrument when you come agin'."—And with that the old gentleman hurried away."

"Did you place the pigtail on the window-sill?" I asked.

"In course, I did—the raal ginewine."

"And did he come after it?"

"As reg'lar as the night came. I never knew him to fail, and an uncommon sight o' the stuff he made way with. If all my relations had come back, and used as much o' the weed as he did, I should ha' been dead broke."

"And what kind of tobacco did Sam Flint smoke at that time?" I continued.

"Pigtail—nothin' but pigtail, jest like that used by the old gentleman," said Sutler, with a look irresistibly comical.

"How was it about your father's ghost?" I said, one day to Sutler, when we were alone.

"The fact o' the case was," he replied, "I found it took off the change like all natur to keep my father in terbacker; so I told Flint all about it, and axed him if he could n't supply the old man with a plug or two occasionally, for old acquaintance' sake."

"I couldn't think of it," says he; "got a large famerly to support, and I use an awful sprinklin' o' the weed myself. But I've got a pound or two I'll sell ye cheap."

"What kind is it?" I asked.

"Pigtail," said he.

"Bring it over," says I.

"With pleasure," says he; and so the next day he brought it over, and I bought it. Well, come to look it over, I found some o' the identical plugs which I had laid on the winder-sill for the old gentleman. Upon careful inquiry I larned that he'd sold several pounds o' the stuff to the neighbors, and seemed to have a plenty o' the same sort; although, afore that, he used to be hard up on terbacker, for he was poor as Job, and an uncommon smoker. Arter that time, I did n't lay any more plugs on the winder-sill, thinkin' it best to let the old gentleman depend on his own exartions for a supply o' pigtail."

"Many ghost stories would probably end in the same way, if traced back to their true origin, I doubt not," I remarked.

"It's not unposserble, doctor; but still, I'm a leetle inclined to berlieve in sich things, arter all. There's sunthin' inside of a man that tells him, when a poor human creter dies, that an't the end on't; and, if that an't the end on't, why mayn't the sperit o' that same human cretur come back to us on extrordinor occasions? The Master o' Life may marcifully permit the immortal principle to visit the friends as it had known on airth while in the nateral body. I say that it don't seem to me that there is nothin' onreasonable in the idee. It's true I'm allers tellin' tough stories, and blunderin' into some kind o' nonsense; but, as I'm a livin' man, I wouldn't deliberately and willin'ly make light o' sich subjecks, for no consideration whatsoever."

One evening Leroy and some trappers were talking of horses, and the condition to which they were sometimes reduced by hardship and hunger, when he told a story in the following unique style:

"That reminds me of a circumstance," said Sutler. "It was my misfortin' once to be the owner of a very venerable horse. I never larnt his age exactly; but it was sunthin' short of a century. The cretur had n't no teeth, and the oldest trappers did n't remember when he lost 'em. For the last few years he had subsisted on cracked corn, soaked and biled to his compacity o' munchin', and the delereate state of his digestive functions. As for grass, he'd f'orgot what 'twas made for, and contented himself with layin' on't without any ruminisances of other days. He'd been blind for the last ten years, when his former perprierter hired me to take him out o' the country. Findin' his eyes wan't of no sarvice to him, the interlecteral creter shut 'em up to keep the dust out, and never pertended to open 'em, which give a malanchully expression to his countenance, and on the whole rayther injured his parsonal appearance. He was oncommon poor, was that hoss; the back-bone had worn through the nateral skin, and I used to hang my powder-horn and ball-pouch on the spurious prostitooters (spinous processes) when I went on the war-path, as the ryptiles say, and the effect was highly pieteresk. The hip and shoulder bones were in the same unpertected and unsheltered condition, and he never pertended to take 'em in when it rained; the marrer was stole out of 'em a few days afore I consented to take him, by a half-starved root-digger; but they were kind o' convenient-like, because I used to lay my rifle across 'em, and there was n't no danger of its fallin' off: for Snorter—that was his name—was a proper easy-goin' cretur, and never rared up for'ards, or kicked up behind. He was an exemperlary beast, and wan't afeared o' nothin' under the canerpy o' heaven. He wouldn't turn out for nothin', on any consideration whatsomever; and I don't exaggerate, nor get out from under the redeemin' inference, when I say that I've known that cretur to run agin five pine trees, four sycamores, two bears, and a catamount, one buffaler, and ten rocky mountains, in suceession, without gettin' discouraged or malanchully in the least. When I used to contemplate the subject philerosophically and discom-passionately, I used to e'enermost believe in the parseverance o' the saints. My *tout ensemble*, as the French say, when mounted and ready for a start, was orgust and imposin' in the extreme, when looked at in that pint o' view. Well, to make a long story short, and do justice to the manerfold virtooes of Snorter,—I was journeyin' through the country of the Bannecks, intending to make a brilliant descent upon the bloody Blackfeet. All of a sudden, I heerd a terrible clamor, and thought I was surrounded by the inemy. I instantly turned round toward the anermal's tail; for it was easier to do that than to turn Snorter, he was so mild like, and moderate, in his nateral dispersition. Without losing my presence o' mind for a minit, I begun sharp'nin' my knife on the hip bones, when the danger seemed to threaten me right over head. Upon lookin' up into the air, the whole canerpy was swarmin' with crows, yellin' like all possest. I had a terrible persentiment o' danger as soon as my visable orgins fell on the feathered ryptiles. For a short time or longer the cawin' was perfectly tremendous and astoundin'. I gin Snorter the rein, and, for the first time, turned my back upon the inemy. For six days and nights, without stoppin' to eat water, or drink meat, for man or hoss, I pressed forrard, boyed up by the vain hope of escape. But it wan't of no avail; it was caw! caw! the whole contineral time; no sleep to my eyelids, or rest to my eyes. I was forced to give in, and leave Snorter to his fate. I jumped down from my gallant war-horse, leavin' all my things hung on to his framework. In half an hour there wan't nothing left of him but his timbers. When the crows had gone, with a sad heart, I went and picked out my powder-horn, shot-bag, rifle, &c., from among the venerable remains."

CHAPTER XVII.

AGAIN ON THE TRAIL.

On the 14th of August we recommenced our wanderings. We succeeded in purchasing a couple of mules, and such supplies as we needed. All things considered, our outfit was not a bad one. The Kansas Indian set out with us. All rejoiced at this accession to our numbers, save Wickliffe. On the 20th of the month, after six days' hard travelling, we encamped at the Red Buttes. The Black Hills still towered away at our right, their distant tops piercing the

clouds, while the Wind River chain of the Rocky Mountains hemmed us in iike an immense wall. These mountains are very lofty, and perpetually capped with snow. Many rivers take their rise among those impenetrable fastnesses, flowing, some to the Atlantic, and others to the Pacific. There is something wild and striking in the idea that streams, having their birth in the bosom of those rugged elevations, should travel away in different directions, to mingle with the far-distant wave at last, having accomplished their mighty pilgrimage; which may aptly be compared to the journey of life. The travelling for the last few days had been growing more difficult. There were hills to toil over, brooks and ravines to cross, which required all our patience and power of endurance. Our position was now one of considerable interest. We were in the most dangerous part of the wilderness, the country most infested by the terrible Blackfeet. The mighty mountains that walled us in afforded them temporary homes, while they surprised small war-parties of other tribes, bands of emigrants, or the white trapper. They burst from their fastnesses in hours unexpected; and woe to those surprised, for no mercy can be expected. None but experienced mountaineers may outwit or cope with them in fight. Even the shrewd Bonneville, and the indefatigable Frémont, came off second best when they measured their cunning with those lords of the wilderness. Ossawaun was diligent in pointing out the different spots we passed where bloody forays had taken place between the red man and the white. His eyes lighted up and glowed like coals when he talked of battle. It struck me that he had an unnatural appetite for carnage. His name was certainly more romantic than his character.

"August 21st.—I have formed such a habit of journalizing that I cannot very well forego an opportunity of jotting down my impressions. We feel the need of rest. The vigilance of Wickliffe and Leroy increases at every step. Our horses are picketed every night, and we stand guard by turns. When it is practicable, we throw up a slight fortification, by the aid of such trees as are convenient. We have had several alarms in the night; but have been so well prepared that no attack has been made, if intended. I shall be heartily glad when we get away from this dangerous vicinity. I am feverishly anxious for the safety of those with us. I cannot forget Burrill; it seems to me that he is near.

"Wickliffe and the 'Barbed Arrow' get along rather poorly together. He has offered to stand guard with us; but the former won't allow it. He prefers, he says, to take his place, rather than trust him. Silver-Knife and the savage, apparently, are on good terms; but one thing I have observed—he never allows the strange Indian out of his sight. We left our wagon that we procured at Fort Haramie, two days ago; it retarded our movements. We packed what we could upon the two mules, and now go on much faster. * * * I have not yet spoken of love to Madeleine. I have resolved to declare myself a hundred times, and my courage has failed as often. I have staked so much upon the result that I dread to have the question decided; and yet I am convinced she is not entirely indifferent to me. I recall all her words on the night of her escape, and cherish them in my memory like things precious. Thus is my mind a storehouse for the past. Ossawaun is now relating to Sutler the history of a fight at a place called Pierre's Hole. It is probably the same mentioned by Bonneville, where several lives were lost. Our Indian affirms that he was there, but whether in a friendly way he saith not. Yesterday Sutler shot a buffalo. It was rather imprudent in him to do so, for the report of his rifle might have reached some lurking enemy.

"23d.—Another day's journey nearer the place of our destination. The scenery is wild and imposing. There is nothing tame here. Nature shows her works on a grand scale. The mountains are higher, the valleys deeper, than in other countries. We have seen several antelopes to-day. The Indian with the chivalrous name was intent on shooting one, but Wickliffe sternly forbade him. The fellow obeyed sullenly enough. A short time after, he began to chant a wild song, whose wilder echoes went reverberating among the mountains. Wickliffe rode up to him, and in a commanding voice warned him not to repeat it again, on his peril. He complied with a bad grace, and a sinister leer of the eye. I am persuaded there is mischief in that savage. The restraint under which he finds himself makes him terribly uneasy. He often looks anxiously to the mountains. Does he expect anything from that quarter? I must watch him. He has just been telling Sutler another of his abominable stories. To

me it had an ominous sound, which cast a gloom over my spirits. The tale was as follows, varied in style a little, of course; for I cannot embellish it with all his *Indianisms*.

"A great many moons ago," said he, "a band of pale-faces came here to trap. There were five in all. Most of them were young men. They knew little about the country, and some of them were never in the mountains before. The Blackfeet soon put their eyes on them. They said in their hearts, 'These men are squaws; they cannot fight. We will destroy them, and take away their horses and traps.' Others, more prudent, said, 'They have rifles in their hands, and they will fight if we attack them openly; therefore let us take them by stratagem. Let one of our braves join them, and offer to guide them to the hunting-grounds. They will embrace the offer, for the brave shall tell them he knows where the game abounds. But, instead of leading the pale-faces to the hunting-grounds to trap the beaver, he shall lead them astray, and we will fall upon them in the night, and thus gain an easy victory.'"

"The warriors said this counsel was good. A young brave volunteered to go and beguile them into ambush. He did so in such a skilful manner that all the white trappers perished but one."

"And what became of the brave?" asked Sutler.

"One of the trappers shot him through the head," replied Ossawaun.

"That's true," replied Sutler, "and I was the man as destroyed the treacherous varmint's fakilities."

"You!" exclaimed the Barbed Arrow, with a start.

"Yes, I, Redskin; you may put that down as sartin. I sent a good half-ounce of lead clean through his brain, and the critter did n't know what hurt him."

"Sarved him right," said Leroy. "There an't no sin like treachery."

"Them's my feelin's," rejoined Sutler; "and I'll jest take this opportunity to remark to this painted critter, as a kind o' hint, that may or mayn't be taken at his lasure, or otherwise, that if he's any sich notions, he'd better be gettin' ready to leave all sublunar things."

Ossawaun made no reply, but affected to take it as a joke too trifling to honor with his attention. * * * The Indians have done well to people this wild country with beings supernatural. Where could demons discover a better home than in those towering mountains at our right. They must find their snowy sides a great luxury, as they come seething hot from their usual quarters. The low muttered thunders, the intestine fires, and the reverberating echoes, are ascribed to *Machinito* — the Bad Spirit."

On the 24th we encamped near the Sweet Water river. Two or three Indians had been seen during the day, which fact warned us to unusual watchfulness. There was but little sleep that night; such a feeling of peril was with us that it was impossible. Wickliffe stretched himself near Ossawaun, while Sutler and Leroy kept unceasing vigils. As for Silver-Knife, he left us, and laid himself down in a thicket at the distance of two or three rods.

"When that Injin cretur does that, you may depend on't there's danger not a great way off; and he'll be the first to know about it," said Baptiste.

"Them's my feelin's," replied Sutler. "When that critter loses his fakilities, there'll be one honest Injin the less. I hope he'll hang on to sublunar things for years to come. But this Barbed Arrer, as he calls himself, in my humble opinion, an't to be depended on."

"It's hard tellin'," answered Leroy. "As the people used to say where I's raised, you can't tell a chap allers by the cut of his coat."

"No more you can't, old boy; but this onconverted critter has n't a coat to his back; and I don't b'lieve he ever owned sich a thing as an honest Injin's blanket."

"If I thought he warn't jest the thing, and was comin' the 'possum over us with his non'sns', I'd finish the low-born cretur in jest no time at all, and prehaps quicker," said Leroy.

Here the parties moved away, and I heard no more of the conversation. In the course of an hour all was still. Sutler and Leroy, wrapped in their blankets, were seated upon the ground outside the camp. Both Wickliffe and Ossawaun gave the long, regular respirations of sleep. I lay with my eyes partially closed, and restless enough to be walking about, instead of trying to slumber.

I saw Ossawaun open his eyes, and peer hastily about the camp. He closed them again, and in a few minutes repeated the operation. Having satisfied himself, apparently, that we were sleeping soundly, he cautiously aroso to a sitting pos-

ture. I glanced at Wickliffe. To my great satisfaction, he opened his eyes, gave me a significant look, and shut them again. Ossawaun rose to his feet. For an instant he stood over Wickliffe, regarding him with a scowl of mortal hatred. Once his fingers strayed to the handle of his hunting-knife, and I should have interfered had I not been conscious that Wickliffe was on his guard. The Indian then walked noiselessly from camp.

"Truly," thought I, "he won't allow the fellow to leave us thus." But he did, and the Barbed Arrow walked away unchallenged.

"Are you awake?" I whispered to Wickliffe.

"Perfectly," he replied.

"Why, then, do you allow him to go?"

"It is all arranged — Silver-Knife will attend to him; we shall hear a good account of him before morning."

"That alters the case; but ought we not to be on the alert? His object cannot be a good one, I am sure."

"I have always doubted him, but did not wish to condemn without some proof his perfidy. It is my opinion that we shall know within an hour whether he is a true man or a traitor. But we will leave it all with the chief. If there is danger, we shall be warned in time. Nothing escapes his practised eye. A hound never followed fox as closely as he will dog the footsteps of that savage who has just left us."

We arose, and went into the open air. Sutler and Leroy were sitting motionless near the camp.

"Did you see him?" asked Wickliffe.

"In course," replied Leroy. "Them an't the kind o' varmints that catch us sleeping."

"Which way did he go?"

"Away in that direction," added the guide. "But there's a cretur arter him that don't waste his strength for nothin'. I wouldn't be in that heathen's shoes for the best hoss on the prairies."

"Them's my feelin's," said the trapper. "I've seen a host o' ecpper-skins in my day and generation, but I an' seen none equal to that tame Injin o' yourn. He even goes so far as to look like a human critter in the face; and he acts like one, too, or I'm no judge o' the nateral disposition."

In a state of painful uncertainty, we waited the return of Silver-Knife. In about an hour he made his appearance.

"No danger to-night," said he. "Lay down and sleep in peace. Ossawaun will return. He has had a talk with a war-party of Crows. To-night you can rest, but to-morrow night let the pale-faces beware. The snake in the grass is near. He crawls upon the earth — his sting is deadly."

We obeyed the instructions of the chief, and in a short time were in as deep a sleep, seemingly, as when the traitor Indian left us. In about twenty minutes after the return of Silver-Knife, he stole into camp as silently as he went away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OSSAWAUN.

A CHEERLESS morning dawned upon us; clouds shut out the sun, and the rain was falling. The sterile and rugged country about us looked doubly sterile and rugged. The mountains, as they lifted up their heads through the mist, to hide them in clouds, were grim and terrible. The rocky bluffs, the deep ravines, which resembled ghastly wounds in nature, took on a solemn aspect. Sullen sounds were borne upon the air, and not a lone bird struck a note of song.

As contrary as it was to our inclinations, we were obliged to stay where we were until after it had cleared.

"Journal of the 24th. — I have not spoken to Madeleine of the new danger which menaces us. I have not whispered the name of Burrill in her ear; but she knows that he is hovering about us. How she knows, I cannot tell; but I suppose her intuitions tell her. The soul of a pure woman is like the mercury in a thermometer, and sinks or rises as good or evil approaches; or like a mirror, that reflects whatever is near, it catches shadows of the future.

"This dark, dismal day casts a gloom upon all hearts. I believe we human beings gather our best thoughts from sunshine. A year of storm and rain would convert us all into misanthropes and scoundrels, unquestionably. Soft, mellow moonlight, and clear, warm sunlight, make the heart light, and purify it from evil; but darkness and tempests are stimulants to crime.

"I cannot help thinking and asking, where we shall be to-morrow. Poor Mary looks pale and anxious; but her face has a deeper flush when Wickliffe is near. In his presence she appears to forget danger, and looks reassured and strong.

"But has *he* changed? Is he less lofty, and more human? He has changed, but only to rise higher, and put a greater distance between us. Not that he is haughty, or proud; but his noble qualities shine out more conspicuously. He converses but little. When he speaks, Mary trembles, and listens with feverish eagerness. His voice is not fawning when he addresses her; it is deep, musical, and gentle withal, and such a kind of gentleness I cannot describe. He never laughs aloud, seldom smiles; and when he does, it is in the face of danger, or when he catches a glance from the restless eye of Madeleine; for he never smiles when he looks at Mary, but has a more serious expression, as though he pitied her. I am glad he is not given to much laughter, for it is degrading, and detracts from the dignity of a human being, and is at best but the empty echo of a shallow mind. But smiles are sunlight, especially on the lip of woman."

At noon a gentle wind swept away the clouds and the rain. The sunshine gladdened the mountains and valleys, and smoothed the frowns from the sturdy face of nature.

With lighter hearts we commenced our march. Ossawaun was with us, and appeared as usual. Wickliffe rode up to him, asking, carelessly,

"What think you is our best route now?"

For a moment the keen eye of Barbed Arrow was fastened upon the face of the questioner; but there was no change in that face; all the savages on the prairies, or amid the mountains, might look upon it without reading a line of what was passing in the heart that beat so tranquilly beneath. The hard, keen look of Ossawaun melted away, and a lurking, satisfied smile curled his red lip.

"If my red brothers would find the way smooth, and the travelling easy, they must keep away in that direction," he replied, pointing with his brawny hand more to the northwest than we had been going.

"Yes, I recollect—you spoke of that route yesterday; some trappers, you said, were led astray and killed there by the Blackfeet," rejoined Wickliffe, stroking his horse's mane with his riding-whip.

Again the piercing eyes of Ossawaun crept over the features of his companion like writhing serpents, and again they were baffled, and the mocking smile returned.

"The same, brother; but the Blackfeet are gone. No birds of prey are near, and our hearts are big."

"Very true. We have big hearts, and our rifles are sure. But this morning I heard the prairie-wolf."

"And what said the prairie-wolf?" resumed the Indian.

"He told me to sing my death-song, for my end was near."

"Great medicine is the prairie-wolf," added Ossawaun, unmoved.

"He seemed to say, 'Go back, white man; this country was not made for you; it was made for the Indian; you cannot dwell here. The red men are cunning—they will outwit you. Turn back, or die.' Then I said to myself, 'I wonder how long before I shall die;' and the wolf howled again, and I thought he said, 'Before many suns, if you do not go back; but, if you go back to your own country, you shall live.' Then I said to myself, 'The prairie-wolf lies, and I will not go to my own country.'"

"My white brother hears much," said Ossawaun, coolly.

"That is because his ears are open. Fools shut their eyes and their ears, and know nothing."

"The prairie-wolf speaks the truth to the Indian, but lies when he speaks to the white man," replied the wily savage.

"I had a dream, too," added Wickliffe.

"What did my brother dream?"

"I dreamed I journeyed through a strange country—a country of deep gulleys and big hills, like this, where great rivers are born. I thought the way behind me was smooth, and I could travel in that direction without weariness; but the country before me was rough and threatening, and the bad *Machinito* piled hills and mountains and vast rocks in my path to hinder me, so that I should never get to the end of my journey. I kept toiling on; but, when I had conquered one obstacle, another was thrown in my way. This was not all. I saw Indians with war-paint on their faces, who menaced me with their bows and arrows and guns. All at once a tall warrior stood at my side, and offered to conduct me on

my way in safety; then I heard a voice in my ear which said, 'Do not trust him; he is the child of the Bad Spirit.'"

"A great dreamer is my brother," said Ossawaun, stealing a sidelong glance at Wickliffe.

"I did not heed the warning voice, but followed the warrior in silence. The big hills faded away, and we walked over a level plain. Very soon we met a man journeying in the opposite direction. He asked me where I was going. I answered, 'To the distant mountains.' But he replied, 'You are going to the happy hunting-grounds.' Then I asked my guide if it was so; but he would not answer. When we had gone on in this way for several days, we reached a pleasant valley, very much like this. As soon as we had entered it, the hills suddenly arose about us to a great height, and hemmed us in. A great number of savages surrounded me, danced the war-dance, and shook their hatchets at me. The guide turned and looked me in the eyes, and he had your face. He said to me, 'You shall go no further. You shall die, and for that purpose have I conducted you hither.'"

"What did my white brother do then?"

"I awoke, bathed in perspiration, and full of horror. Presently I slept again."

"Very strange! Great medicine is my brother. What did you dream then?"

"That the good Monedo appeared to me in the form of a warrior, and held a cord in his hand like this, and bade me bind you so that you could not run away," and Wickliffe drew a cord from beneath his hunting-shirt, and held it up.

Ossawaun started when he saw it, and looked uneasy.

"And the form told me, if you resisted, to shoot you through the head."

The traitor Indian glanced from one to the other with the rapidity of lightning; then, with a wild cry, which appeared perfectly intelligible to his horse, dashed down the steep, rocky side of a ravine on our left.

Wickliffe urged his horse after him with an energy equal to the occasion, and in an incredibly short space of time we heard the clatter of hoofs far below, and saw sparks of fire driven from the jagged rocks.

"That heathen cretur an't no better nor dead," said Leroy. "I'd sooner have the Royal Bengal tiger arter me nor that onaccountable chap. There's somethin' awful in his eye when he's excited; and a body feels jest as if he'd oughter to go anywhere he says, if it's to the devil."

At that moment the report of a pistol was heard.

"That powder wan't burnt for nothin', I reckon," said Suttler. "It's my conviction that the Barbed Arrer, as he pretends to call himself, has lost his fakilities."

I dashed off in the direction of the sound as fast as Wyandot would carry me, followed by the rest of the party at a slower pace. With some difficulty I descended into the ravine, crossed a brook, and, after galloping about three hundred yards, through bush and brier, came suddenly upon the object of my search. He was holding his horse by the bridle. Near him stood the animal ridden by the Barbed Arrow, but the saddle was empty. The unfortunate being that had filled it lay writhing on the ground. I glanced at Wickliffe; but there was nothing terrible in his expression. The dark frown I had last seen upon his face had faded away. No spark of anger flashed from beneath the dark lids, and the firm lip had nothing of defiance. The man who stood there and held the bridle-rein, and gazed upon the dying Indian, was Wickliffe still; but more thoughtful, and more elevated above the level of common men. There was no touch of human weakness in his visage. He stood and contemplated the wretch at his feet as a great surgeon might look at his handy and necessary work, regardless of the pain. He did not heed my approach, but kept on with his study, for study he evidently made it. The rest of the party came up, and we stood silently about the dying savage. He was shot through the lungs. I knew it by the light, frothy blood that came bubbling from his dark bosom and trickled over his robe of skins—the robe that was to serve him no more. By a strong effort, which taxed his remaining powers to the utmost, he raised himself to a sitting position, and smoothed the knotted furrows from his damp brow. That decided and desperate movement told that he meant to die like an Indian and a warrior. With a slow and wandering hand, he clutched the stained robe, and pressed it to his streaming breast. That was to hoard his life a little longer. He called back his scattered senses, and his glassy eye fired up as he glanced around upon those present. His gaze fell last upon Wickliffe. "Pale-faces, I am dying," he said slowly, while the red tide of life stained his lips. "The voice of Monedo calls me

hence. I do not fear to go, for there is no place on earth where the Indian can rest in peace. The pale-faces have come among us to kill and destroy. In a few years my tribe will be swept away, and their names will be forgotten. I do not wish to see that time, and I'm glad I'm going the long journey. I have been wronged by white men; I have hated white men; I have slain white men; and now I die by the hand of a white man. 'Tis well. I have always expected to die so. I hate you all, and hope you may never come to the happy hunting-grounds, because you would drive away the 'wild Indians.' You think red men are brutes, and that they know nothing. Your people have hunted them as they hunt the deer and the buffalo, and have killed them wherever they could lay hands upon them. You think they have no feeling, and can die without pain. You think it does not hurt us to be cold and naked, and to wander up and down in the mountains without food and shelter. Perhaps you think we are never hungry, or that we eat each other, like wolves. You have pursued and slain my people when they were naked and cold and starving, and all the time you say you have a country of your own. I hate you—I spit upon you—I defy you—I curse you with my last breath! Not only do I hate you, but him who employed me to come here to deceive you. I was glad that you pale-faces were eager to rend and do each other mischief."

We gazed solemnly at the grim figure as it straightened out and fixed itself in death, and then, throwing the robe over the stern and rigid face, left it alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

BESIEGED.

Brave men die in the wilderness, and no stone marks their place of rest. The birds of heaven gorge upon their bodies, or the wild wolf rends them joint from joint; but among civilized men the most miserable craven may have a marble column. The death of Ossawaun put us in a reflective train of thought, and we rode on in silence. Silver-Knife was the first to speak.

"What will my white brothers do now?" he asked.

We looked anxiously at each other, and halted. It was an important question, truly, and required consideration. That a party of Crows were near, led on by Burrill, there could be no doubt. That their numbers exceeded ours, we were equally certain, for Silver-Knife had looked into their encampment. Having dogged our footsteps so many days, we could hardly hope to evade them. It was therefore proposed and agreed that we should retrace our footsteps to our last night's encampment. By so doing, we should in some degree perplex our enemies, and save some labor in felling trees, and constructing a new camp; beside, we wished to make as little noise as possible. With feelings of reluctance, we turned our horses' heads to return. Fortunately, we had left the camp but a few miles behind us. Our first object was to strengthen our position as much as possible, and to this end we availed ourselves of every auxiliary within our reach. Two hours' labor gave it quite the appearance of a fort, and it was dark before we had completed these preparations. It was the opinion of Sutler and Leroy, as well as of the chief, that no attack would be made that night; and the sequel proved they were right, for we were not disturbed.

Early the next morning, we went to work in good earnest. We built a palisade about our camp, of a character quite firm and substantial, and which would cost the most agile some pains to scale. This enclosure was made large enough for our horses. We felt well satisfied with our work when completed, and flattered ourselves that we should be able to withstand a long siege, providing we had plenty of food and ammunition. The latter we were well supplied with, and in the afternoon Leroy and Sutler went out to hunt. Soon after they had gone, an Indian was seen at a distance, who seemed reconnoitring us. Wickliffe examined him attentively for a few minutes, and then sent forth a shrill cry, which sounded like a war-whoop. It was answered, before the echoes had died away, by one shriller and louder; and then he who had perpetrated it came galloping toward us, performing a hundred wild feats of horsemanship. He attested his joy at seeing Wickliffe in many extravagant ways. They talked earnestly together for a long time, after which, the savage threw him-

self once more upon his horse, and scampered away, with but little regard (I thought) for his neck. People know nothing of horsemanship until they see an Indian on horseback. Some of their feats are almost incredible to the dweller in the tents of civilization; so much so, that I will not venture to tell them. For an hour after the departure of the Indian, Wickliffe appeared in deep thought, and paced about our works in silence.

At times he was unusually agitated, if one could judge by his heaving chest and compressed lip. Occasionally he paused, and his eyes wandered toward Mary and Madeleine, and from them to me. He saddled his horse, and was on the point of mounting, when I accosted him.

"You surely do not intend to expose yourself and us to danger by wandering about at this hour, under present circumstances?"

"My time is not yet, Ferguson," he replied.

"It is not easy to tell when one's time has come, or, more properly, when it has gone; and you forget that your movements may endanger us."

I said this, not that I so much feared the danger to ourselves, as the risk he was about to incur.

"I will not endanger you, or those with you, Ferguson. But I must go forth, and alone."

"And why alone?"

"Because it is best thus. I am not a vain, proud, or boastful man; but danger cannot keep me from the path of duty. I have never heeded it, and do not now. Yet I despise no precautions which experience and prudence can suggest. He is a fool who neglects to provide for his safety, and he is a greater one who fears after having done all that wisdom and skill could dictate. As I came to you, so go I forth. Was I not safe before I saw you? Who protected me then? Was it an arm of flesh, or was it a higher power?"

"You believe, then, in a higher power?"

"Who can help believing? There is a voice in nature which talks to me continually of a God. Everything I see every sound I hear, repeats the story. When stretched on the prairie at night, beneath the open expanse, I have been wakeful to watch the stars and the moon, and the great ocean of air, on purpose to feel the nearness of God, and to commune with him through his works. I felt and feel no servile fear. I am content to be governed by one who is higher than I. What is decreed shall come to pass, and no earthly power can blot out one sentence of what is written by Omnipotence."

"I am not a fatalist," I replied. "We are held responsible for our acts. Everything has its price and penalty. As we sow, so also shall we reap. What can be plainer? What figure could teach more aptly the responsibility of man? In our conduct there should always be an adaptation to circumstances. We shun the fire because it will burn, and we love the air because it is the element of life. Carry out the principle. When you would cross the deep, go in a tight ship, and not in a leaky one; for why should heaven protect you, when you scorn to protect yourself? why should you not rather be punished for your fool-hardiness? If a dangerous serpent is in your path, shun it, and take another; it is better to turn back than perish. These ravines, and mountains, and prairies, are full of wild men. You know their habits: shun them, by all means, as much as it is in your power, or you are criminal in the sight of Heaven."

"What you have said is both true and false," he returned.

"You have spoken after the manner of the few, and not of the many. We should conform our conduct to circumstances, and do; but God makes the circumstances, and we arrive at the same results, and are still creatures of fate. If he leads you into a barbarous country, does he not do so for some object, and by any act of yours can you baffle him in that object? I trow not. We are as clay in the hands of the potter. One vessel is made for honor, and another for dishonor. He loved Jacob, and hated Esau, before they had done good or evil."

"Because he foreknew one would be a good, and the other a bad man, even if placed in the same circumstances."

"So you have affirmed, but advanced no proof. Your mere assertion avails nothing. I might also affirm that, had it not been for those springs up there in the mountains, there would have been no flood; but who would believe me? and yet one half of the world reasons thus. So half-mad fanatics describe all the horrors within the boundaries of Hades, and send all the rest of the world to perdition with headlong haste; so they tell the population of the New Jerusalem, its circumference, the length and breadth of its walls, and what the celestial streets are paved with; but who believes them?"

None, save those steeped in the same madness. But I will cease to talk of this; other things demand my thoughts. The declining sun admonishes me to be away. If I thought we should never meet again,—and that may be possible,—I would say a word to you; I would disclose a secret. But no—that impulse is past. If I perish, and you behold my face no more, forget that we ever met, that you ever heard my voice, that you ever saw my face.”

“That is impossible!” I exclaimed, with feeling. “No! no! I cannot do that, but almost anything else you can ask. Let us not part thus in mystery! Let me know more of you. Tear aside the curtain, and let me look down into the depth of your heart. You have been kind, disinterested and noble. I have been instinctively attracted toward you. I have felt safe when near you, and happier when you seemed happy. You have preserved my life. A brother’s solicitude could not have done more. Is it strange, then, that I feel a friendship for you?”

“Very strange!” replied Wickliffe, with a smile in which sadness and misanthropy seemed mingled. “Very strange that such a thing as friendship exists, and it is passing strange it should be found in the wilderness. Friendship has been to me a word without meaning. In all my wanderings upon earth, I have never found it. I am one whom the world has neglected. I was never loved and caressed; I was never humanized by a mother’s soft breath; I was never stimulated to exertion by a father’s smiles. I grew a proud and a disdainful boy. I threw the world back its coldness and neglect. I was a man when others of my age were children; for sometimes hard blows bring forth the hidden fires of the soul, as flint brings it from the stricken steel. I was proud, and sought not the friendship which was not spontaneous. I did not then, and I do not now. It is a pleasing delusion, and only that; but, since I have met you, I have wished it were not so.”

“You are proud, Wickliffe?”

“I know I am, and glory in it. Pride is a man’s surest safeguard. It steels his heart under difficulties; it gives him dignity in prosperity, and courage in the hour of danger. I do not mean arrogance; that is the counterfeit of shallow heads, and not the genuine article. The true pride of manhood never burned in the bosom of a coxcomb.”

“Well, I will not dispute you in this, for it may be so. When shall you return?”

“I cannot tell. If I am successful, I shall see you again soon. Do not think I am abandoning you in the hour of need; do not imagine so, for a moment. My mission is one of danger, but I hope to succeed. If I fail, it is well; if I return, it is better. You will not probably be able to stir from here for several days. If you do not see me within forty-eight hours, believe I am no more. You have good, strong hearts with you, and can stand a long siege.”

“But will you not bid adieu to Mary and Madeleine, before you leave us?”

“No, I had better not; it would give them an idea of danger, and perhaps make them uneasy on my account.”

“Do you not think there is one heart among us that will sigh for you, when you are gone?”

“Who do you mean?” he asked, with a start of surprise.

“Yonder gentle girl,” I answered, pointing to Mary.

Wickliffe changed color, and bit his lips.

“Why should she burden her thoughts with me? Let her not think of me; but to say that is a waste of words; probably she does not, more than of Sutler, or that proud Indian chief. Don’t wrong one so young, and so artless, and the sister also of the woman you adore. I am not the man to awaken tender emotions in her heart.”

“You are not the man, Wickliffe, to be slighted by woman or pass her by unobserved. Pardon me, for I do not wish to flatter (that is a meanness I never stoop to); but there is something in your bold figure, your calm countenance, your lofty and perhaps proud expression, that is calculated to command the attention of a young and ardent girl.”

“Well, suppose it be so; what, then? Do you imagine it is a subject of self-gratification with me that I can dazzle the eyes or ensnare the affections of an unsophisticated young girl? If you do, you mistake me. The gift of pleasing is a fearful gift; I have it not, and desire it not. Woman-pleasers are vain, and I despise vanity, for it does not become a man. Shame upon him who exults in the conquest of a heart that can never be his! If I thought that pure young creature loved me, however flattering and agreeable the knowledge might be to my heart, I might be tempted to ride away into the wilds, and never look upon her sweet face again. She is hopeful now; but, if she should learn to love me, it might be otherwise. Mine is a dark destiny, for I was

born under a dark planet; and the same darkness might fall upon her path. I am strong within myself. I can exist without being loved; for I have been schooled to isolation, and the soul’s solitude, from childhood. Yes, I have learned to be self-reliant and self-sufficient. The outcast naturally learns that lesson, if he be of the true material; otherwise, he sinks under the bitterness of his lot. But it is a severe and terrible ordeal, that of learning to live within one’s self, and not receive one single sweet pulsation from the great heart of humanity that beats without and around him. Yet there is something of pride in the consciousness that one can exist alone, and turn everything to his own use and comfort, with his own unaided hands. There is something sublime in the idea, also, when you lie down upon the boundless prairies at night wrapped in your blanket (which you have stripped from the body of some wild animal), with your arms beside you, and your food smoking upon the fire, that you are master of your own fortunes, subject to no command, and no laws but those of God. One lies down and sleeps well, and the dangers of that kind of life prevent it from becoming monotonous and wearisome. This is true independence.”

“Yes, but a savage independence, Wickliffe. What would be the fate of mankind, if all adopted this mode of existence? Where would be the arts and sciences? and what would be the destiny of woman—where would her soft influence be felt; where would she shed her light and truth; whose heart would be made better by her?”

“I did not say all should adopt this mode of life; all cannot—it is not in their nature. Let each one follow his own inclination. Let those to the desert who love the desert; those to the city who love the city; those to the arms of woman who love woman. But think not the kind of independence I have mentioned is without its uses. From such spirits we get our first knowledge of new countries. They pave the way to civilization, and pilot us to new regions, and new sources of wealth.”

“Still, I believe the isolated soul must turn to woman for a little sunlight; and so you will turn to Mary.”

“True, she may light my path for a brief season, but nothing more. The passing gleam will fade, as the ‘Will-o’-the-wisp’ sinks down and disappears in the ferny ground, where the traveller has been lured to step aside. I have never opened my heart, and laid its secrets bare to mortal, nor will I now to you. I am not so weak as to do so. I have some secrets, and I will keep them; and *one* which would make your cheek pale with wonder. If I see you no more, it will perish with me. Perhaps I have not received graciously your offers of friendship; but I am your friend, nevertheless. For the present, adieu. Have no care for my safety; imagine that nothing can harm me, and that deliverance from present peril is near.”

Wickliffe shook my proffered hand, vaulted into the saddle, and rode slowly away.

“Our meeting was strange, and strangely we part,” I muttered sadly, as I watched the figure of my friend growing less and less in the distance.

I was awakened from my reverie by the approach of the chief.

“The Big Heart has gone,” he said.

I nodded assent.

“My white brother fears for his scalp?”

“I do, my friend, and I should be unfeeling not to do so, when he has dared so much for me.”

“Let not my brother be sad. Great Medicine is the Big Heart. Nothing can hurt him; he bears a charmed life.”

Leroy and Sutler made their appearance. They had been successful, and their horses were laden with the flesh of the buffalo, although they had ventured but a short distance from camp.

It was rather unfortunate that they were obliged to discharge their rifles, on account of the proximity of the enemy; but, under the circumstances, it could not be avoided as our provisions were exhausted.

“I reckon as how, if the creturs how fight, we can stand a pretty considerable long siege,” observed Leroy, as he proceeded to unlade his beast.

“Them’s my feelin’s, and I don’t think it’s onreasonable to kalkilate that some o’ them Philistians will lose their fakilities.”

“As I have obsarved afore,” replied Leroy, “there’s nothin’ like the eye. It’s rayther my conviction it was made on purpose to shoot at, for it’s placed in a conspicuous persition, and is jest about the size of a Kentucky target. The moral effect of that style o’ killin’ is perdigious; for it scares the heathen creturs e’namost out o’ their skins.”

"Yes, that's rayther a harnsum way o' doin' the thing; but every one must have his own pertickerler mark, or we couldn't tell who the top-knots belong to. I *do* the consarned varmin right through the root o' the nose, or, as the doctor would say, the nasal orgin. When you put the lead in there, you may be sure there an't no great waste o' powder and ball. I'm not the man as loves to boast o' his explites, like a drunken Mexican, or half-breed, but I kalkilate there would n't be nothin' onproper in sayin', in a kind o' modest way, that I have seen several o' the nateral varmin o' this onhoppy sile, who have met their distiny in that kind o' shape. It don't give the missionaries no great chance, for they're out o' the reach o' the 'nurtur and admernition' afore they have time to kiss the cross, and say anything pious-like."

"You've touched on a subject now as I don't want to make light on. There can't be much required o' the creturs, because the means o' grace has been denied 'em; and the gospil privileges an't very extensive arter they've bin shot in the eye. They would n't know a psalm-book from a pack o' keerds, arter old Ironsides has looked 'em in the face. I don't say it's right to kill Injins; I don't say it gives me pleasure to kill Injins; but it's a case o' necessity, and can't be helped. They're endowed by natur' with rovin' dispersitions, and a nateral hankerin' arter human blood, which makes 'em dangerous. I finishes 'em as the surgeon amper tates a limb, because it must be done; and he takes the least of the two evils. Prehaps they've got an immortal soul, and prehaps they have n't. Most of 'em, in my opinion, an't much better nor cattle. It's hard to tell what civilization might do for 'em—but I don't think it would make the weight of a feather's difference in their habits and inclernations. Cruelty and treachery is born in 'em; and what's bred in the bone can't be got out. To be Christians, their whole natur' must be changed and renervatrd. Who can change the natur' of an Injin? They was created a race of wild creturs, and a race of wild creturs they'll remain. 'Tis the natur of the beast."

The night drew on, and we disposed ourselves about our little fortification as we thought most conducive to the general safety. The females were required to stay in the camp where the shots of the enemy—providing we were attacked—could not reach them. The name of Burrill filled them with dread; they knew why we were thus dogged from place to place, and trembled for the result. Madge was trusting and hopeful as ever. She spoke words of encouragement to her daughters, as on another occasion, and counselled them to be strong.

She told them that every hair of their heads was numbered, and not one could fall to the ground without the permission of their Heavenly Father. Her admonitions did not fall upon heedless ears. Both Madeleine and Mary treasured them up, and manifested a degree of courage and cheerfulness hardly to be expected under the circumstances. I saw Mary's eyes wandering about as if in search of some one.

"He has gone," I said, with a smile.

The poor girl blushed till her cheeks were burning red.

"Who has gone?" she asked, in a voice intended to be very indifferent and commonplace, but really very tremulous and agitated.

"Wickliffe," I replied, in a whisper.

She grew very pale, and asked,

"Where?" in a whisper softer than I could command.

The cry of "Injins! Injins!" prevented a reply.

"Do not fear," I said, taking a hand of each of the girls. "I feel a good assurance of success; you shall never fall into the hands of Burrill, while a man of us is alive to defend you."

I pressed the hand of Madeleine to my lips; it was not withdrawn—it did not shrink and tremble. The blush that mantled her cheek gave place to a smile—a smile that seemed to me trusting and loving, and full of hope. Mary looked into the face of each, and smiled also; but her smile was sadder, though gentle and approving.

When I left them to take my place at the palisade, my heart beat hopefully, and my arm, I imagined, had the strength of three. The night had just set in, and a shadowy indistinctness pervaded everything. Figures could be seen in the distance which flitted dreamily like objects in a magic lantern. Puffs of smoke went up in fantastic wreaths, and sharp explosions broke upon the ear, and went ringing away in echoes amid the darkened hills. There was an incessant pattering upon the palisade like a shower of hail, and shivered splinters of wood flew about us. Cries like those which the famishing wolf utters in his starving throat, came tearing

discordantly through the air. Within the palisade, no shot was yet fired. Cool, sagacious, self-possessed men stood unmoved, awaiting their time. The foe, emboldened by our silence, came more confidently from their coverts, fired, and then fell back precipitately.

"Let the creturs have it all their own way," said Leroy, whose grim figure had been motionless for the last half-hour. "They're gettin' bolder and bolder, and more noisy, jest like a parcel of onwhipped boys. Let 'em waste their powder and shot, if they want to; we'll teach 'em the valley of it soon. They may yell till they bust their confounded constertations, but who's afeared."

"If them an't my feelin's, I am the man as an't got no feelin's," replied Sutler; "that is, none to speak on. It's kinder amusin' like to see 'em come and let sliver at randerum, and then run back agin to the bush, like a flock of cowardly wolves, as they are. Now, if I was a chap as had a boy ten years old as would conduct in that onharnsum and sneakin' style, I'd thrash him till he could n't repeat the Lord's prayer back'ards; consarn me, if I would n't! If a feller's goin' to fight, let him fight, and not make a mock on't. See! they're gettin' obstroperlus. What a chance for a shot! My shootin' iron can't seasily contain itself, and is acterly sweatin' with impashunts."

"Not yet—not yet," said the guide. "Their pluck is risin' fast. They begin to think we're skeered e'enamost to death, and can't pull a trigger to save our lives, jest for their shoutin', and yellin', and hubbub."

"Here they come," added Suttler, "in categorical confusion and kaotic order. Consarn me, if that crittur an't comin' clean up. If he don't loose his fakilities, my name an't Sutler."

The enemy had indeed grown daring, and one of them, in the true spirit of Indian bravado, had ventured almost near enough to touch the palisade. This was too provoking to bear long, and my own rifle felt about as impatient as Sutler's. At a short distance from our picket stood a tall sycamore, some of the branches of which swayed to and fro over our heads. The warrior who had performed the piece of bravado alluded to now determined to distinguish himself by another, more daring, and requiring more address, and which consequently would reflect more honor upon him. This feat was nothing more nor less than climbing the tall sycamore, and looking down into our camp, to learn the exact position of affairs. He approached the tree in a creeping posture, while the others made a great noise in another quarter, to divert our attention.

"Let the cretur try it," whispered Leroy, "and let them other creturs scream and dance about, and see what'll come on't."

The Indian reached the tree, and began the ascent on that side furthest from us. We saw his red hands noiselessly clasp the trunk and put forth their strength, and caught occasional glimpses of the moccasined feet as they fixed themselves upon the surface of the rough bark, and assisted to urge the body upward by imperceptible gradations. First, the hands performed their part, and then the feet took their place, and then the former glided slowly upward, again to lift the other portions. The task was painfully fatiguing, and reminded me of a sailor whom I once saw undertake to climb a greased "Liberty Pole." Sometimes the climber paused through sheer exhaustion, and looked back as an inexperienced cub might do during his initiation in the sublime science of climbing. The affair was a serious one, even for an Indian; for the tree was without limbs for a great number of feet.

"It's my conviction," said Sutler, after watching his movements in philosophical silence, "that that critter will come down without his fakilities—mem'ry in perticerler."

"For the good of his friends, I hope the heathen has made his will," remarked Leroy, "and that he has n't neglected none o' the means of grace; because life's onsartin, and he may n't never set under the droppings o' the sanctooary no more in the probationer state."

"For the sake o' his futur prospects, I am the man as hopes he's been an exemplar Injin, and one as has n't set his heart too much on sublunar things. Prehaps as how he *has* laid up his treasures *above*—and is goin' up arter 'em. As you've obsarved, life's a ticklish thing, and one may be called on to stick his toes up sooner nor he's ready. All flesh is as grass, and nothin' shorter. It grows up at night, and is cut down and dried afore mornin'. Them's my feelin's."

"I hope the wretched cretur an't got no children," said the guide, musingly.

"I responds to that senterment," replied Sutler, "because as how cubs becomes *bars* arter a while!"

"I don't mean that altogether, Sutler—not that; but even them Injin creturs may have some feelin',—enough, perhaps, to feel the loss of a father. I think of them things, because I have children of my own."

"Don't think o' sich nons'ns', old feller, they an't nothin' more nor young catamounts or young bars. They have n't no nateral feelin'; it an't the natur o' the animal."

"Prehaps it an't; but I allers think of sich absurd things at perticerler times and seasons; it's my *weakness*. But no man can say I fight less bravely for it, in the hour of peril."

During this time the savages continued to fire upon our pickets without effect, and the climber to ascend with breathless caution, where a squirrel could scarce find a place for his foot to rest. I watched his progress with strange interest, and asked myself, with a shudder, how he would *come down*! After infinite labor, and when I thought his strength must fail, he reached the first limb, and, grasping it firmly, drew himself up, and seated himself upon it. The rest of the task was comparatively easy, and, with the same cat-like caution that had characterized his motions from the first, he mounted to the more elevated branches, and was actually over our heads, and peering down into our camp.

"That's a nice critter for ye—a *nice* critter!" whispered Sutler. "What do you s'pose the missionaries could do for him? He han't no more notion o' the scriptures o' dervine truth nor an onborn catamount, nor a nigger; and that's sayin' a good deal. If he was anythin' like a *human*, he would give the rest o' his minits to medertation on heavenler and dervine things, and not bother his mind about temperal consarns. I'm afared the critter's carneller minded."

"Well, let the *varmint* hang there for a season like a possum, while we speak to his heathen bretheren; they're gettin' a leetle to fermiliar to be agreeable to my feelin's. Old Ironsides can't stand it no longer. The dumb thing'll go off itself. The powder's growin' hot in the pan, as true as I'm a Christian cretur. My blood begins to rile up, and I don't keer a gra'-deal whether that anermal over our heads has got children or not. These troublous times kinder changes a man's natur, and make him feel like eatin' somethin' as warn't made to eat. I can't scasily contain myself. Jest look at *that*, will ye? An't that jest a few more drops in the cup of our *indignities* than flesh and blood can bear? Now's our time—pick yer marks, and pepper 'em in the name of retributive justice."

The usually kind expression of Leroy had vanished, and the fire of battle taken its place. Those flashes of feeling which distinguished him on ordinary occasions were no longer apparent in word or gesture. A frown fierce and stern darkened his visage, and the soul of the "fighting man" only was revealed. Our silence had prompted our enemies to acts of boldness hardly to be endured, although the very state of things which we wished to produce. After wasting much powder and ball upon our pickets; they probably began to imagine we were not provided with ammunition. This was a fatal mistake, as they soon learned, to their cost. The more daring began to run toward our palisade, and then back again, discharging their fire-arms, and yelling horribly. Seeing no harm came of it, they began to think it was quite the thing; and so rushed up in a body, fired, and scampered away. This was done with more boldness, inasmuch as the climber had succeeded so well.

The time had now arrived to make a defensive demonstration. We discharged our rifles at the same moment, when the enemy were nearest. Before they had regained their covert, those of us who had two barrels fired those also, and several pistol-shots rattled after them. To say that the Crow warriors were astonished would convey but an imperfect idea of the real state of things; not only were they astonished but they absolutely howled with rage. All their hopes of bloodless victory were at an end, and they expressed their excessive disappointment thereat in true savage style. Seven of their warriors had fallen, which was rather a significant foretaste of what they might expect from us. They were now more cautious, though occasionally one exposed himself during some savage demonstration of anger; in which case, a cry, a leap upward, announced that his earthly warfare was over. Burrill was not seen, and his voice was not heard; but we felt well assured that he was observing all these movements, and encouraging his red allies. Meantime the Indian in the sycamore was amusing himself by looking at us. I regret that I am not able to inform the reader in relation to the exact state of his feelings during our first discharge; but it is something utterly out of my power, as subsequent events prevented him from communicating with me in relation to that interesting subject. Whether he flattered himself that he was unobserved,

and in a position of security, or whether a vague apprehension of his impending fate made him tremble, I am unable to tell. Perhaps the angel of death touched him with his wing as he flew over, and he heard the sound of his pinions in the air. Even the wild man has something human in him, and the shadow of darkness may have fallen upon him then.

"The cretur has rushed upon his destiny," said Leroy, "and I s'pose he must go under."

"As the parsons say about asking grace—'it's your *privilege*,' old feller," replied Sutler. "He's a vessel o' wrath, fitted up for distruction; but I would n't advise ye to shoot *too dead*, mind ye—*too dead*! you understand?"

"Not in the eye; ha?"

"In course not; but make an example on him to the rest o' the *Phillistians*. It may prove kind o' salutary, and prevent 'em from climbin' trees, and puttin' themselves in persitions o' danger. This finishin' 'em off is a reg'lar science, and requires a heap o' study and practice. Each man has his perticerler fancy. Some shoot in the eye; others prefer the bridge o' the nose; and a third party are fond o' the heart, stomach and lungs, for a mark. I'm not a notional chap, by no means. I can see sunthin' good in everythin' (except in the perverse natures of the nateral ryptiles of this sile), and I'm willin' that each indervidoaal should be governed accordin' to the dictates of his conscience, reservin' to myself the same priverlege. When I fust came to these parts, I used to finish 'em off on the disablin' system.

"The disablin' system is where you knock 'em off their nateral pins, without woundin' any o' the vital orgins. When a ryptile is fairly shot through both his nateral legs, he is jist as good as dead, and you don't run no risk in countin' his scalp, unless you get worsted in the fight, and his friends carry him away. I've done it many a time when I warn't in no great hurry, and beavers were gettin' cunnin' about takin' trap. Like all other arts and sciences, it requires practice, and some knowledge of the anatomy of the body; because as how the bones must be broke in order to carry out and illustrate the beauty o' the system. The advantages o' this perticerler fact is self-evident, and can be understood by the most inexperienced beginner. If no bones ~~is~~ broke, ten to one if he don't run away, and you lose a good charge o' powder and ball, without promotin' the cause o' civilerzation in the least; but when the nateral pins is once broke, there is nothin', accordin' to the laws o' philoserphy, to support the anermal corperation, and, in complience with the rules and regerlations of gravertation, it sticks to the sod; because the nateral constertooction of a ryptile is in the legs."

Leroy threw himself back upon his right foot, drew up his tall, gaunt figure, and brought "Old Ironsides" slowly to his shoulder. For a moment he stood rooted to the spot like a firm-fibred tree in a dead calm, when not a leaf stirs, or a twig shivers in the air; then the breech of the rifle dropped from his shoulder and fell to the ground. I looked up at the Indian. His eyes were starting from their sockets, as if the vains of death had already seized him.

"I can't say it's any pleasure to me to finish the cretur," said Leroy, in a serious tone of voice, "especially in the sort o' way you speak on. If the wretched heathen was where he could have a kinder chance for his life, I could do it with better heart."

"It's my conviction he would n't give you much o' a chance, f he had you treed like a *bar*, or a 'possum. You'd lose your fakilities afore you had time to say 'Our Father,' and kinder straighten yerself up for the change."

"I know there's a sprinklin' o' truth in what you affarm, to speak perlite, like the doctor, but there's quite a difference in our persition in the sight o' God. I've had the ways and means (although I haven't improved 'em, more's the pity), of becomin' a good man and that cretur an't. Or, in other words, I've been exposed to the gopil, and he has n't."

"That's all very well in its way, but it's my conviction that you might expose 'em to the means o' grace for years together, and 't would n't have no more affect than water spilt on the ground. Them red-skins are the swine as you must n't cast your pearls afore."

"I haven't no great objections to finish him at once, but I'd a *ee*tle rayther you'd do it, if it's necessary to make an example o' the cretur, and work him off kinder *graderal* like; not that I don't appreciate your kindness, in givin' me the first preference, mind ye; but, if I've a weakness, it's the *eye*!"

"The eye's good, 'though I go in for the root o' the nose; ut I an't the chap as can't be magnanimus, and give honor where honor's due. Though, as I've said, I prefer the bridge o' the *nasil* orgin, I can do *plain shootin*.' I don't feel it no disparigement to do *pain shootin*—as shootin in the legs, or arms or in the lungs, or in the stomach, and other parts o'

the system. So I don't mind accommerdatin' ye, notwithstanding the onhappy condition o' the critter in relation to the futur state, the means o' grace, and all them kind o' fixins. But it's the varmint's own fault, and it's too late for him to git posted up on them subjicks now."

The heavy, greasy rifle of Sutler came smartly to his shoulder. He laid his cheek lovingly upon the breech, as though it was a living thing, and *knew* and *understood* him. He seemed to speak to it with his eyes as they ran along the bronze-colored barrel; and his hands appeared to caress it as they carried it toward the object. The attitude of an old hunter in the act of firing is a study in itself. In shooting an object upon the *ground*, the left foot is thrust out, the knee slightly flexed, and the whole body thrown forward. In firing into a tree, the attitude is different; the body is thrown back upon the right foot, while the right knee is flexed, and the head elevated, rendering the chest full and prominent, and giving the left side to the object. And then, in this defiant and bold position, the whole figure seems suddenly to freeze or turn to stone. The muscles of the left arm and leg are drawn tight and firm; there is no relaxation, no motion, no trembling, no rebellion of nerve or eye; the breathing is suspended; the chest ceases to rise and fall; a feather would not float from the lips; an eye of glass would move and express as much life. For a single instant, the man might be stone or iron, and only that. Suddenly there is an explosive, ringing sound, which echoes through the woods like the crack of a whip; the feet are no longer rooted to the earth, but up-torn on the instant; the arms are no longer iron arms, but flesh and blood; the body is no longer thrown back, but becomes erect; the eye is no longer glassy and fixed, but flashing and eager. It was thus with Sutler when he levelled and fired at the miserable being in the sycamore. The smoke curled quickly away. The luckless Indian was still upon the limb, but no cry gave sign of mortal hurt. I heard a pattering sound upon the withered leaves at my feet; it was blood, warm from the veins of the savage. A slight breeze blew misty atoms of it in my face, and it had already the clamminess of death. I instinctively recoiled, and brushed it away with my open hand.

"He's got it — nothin' but plain shootin' though, — about half an inch below the breast-bone — *starnum*, as the doctor'd say," said Sutler, turning a handful of powder into his rifle, and driving a ball rapidly after it.

"Don't often penetrate *plain shootin'* though sometimes it answers better nor *fancy work*. It's my conviction he's got his gruel. Don't be *ticklish*, doctor; 't an't no worse nor bufferler blood, and no better nor any wild varmint's; if 't was, I'd tell yer so. I an't the man as would deceive the young. See! the critter's gettin' narvous. He holds on to that limb as if he never expected to give up *sublunar* things."

I glanced again at the Indian, and could not withdraw my gaze. He was growing weaker and weaker from loss of blood, and it was with difficulty he could keep his body balanced upon the limb. His lower extremities had already slipped from their former resting-place. His chest lay upon the frail tenure, while he grasped it with his hands to maintain his equilibrium. The strange pattering was still heard upon the withered leaves; but the drops were thicker and heavier, and fell at longer intervals, with a deadly, solemn monotony; and, in proportion as the drops grew thicker and heavier, and less frequent, the body of the wretch slipped from the limb. The shouting and firing had ceased among his red brethren; they stood awe-stricken spectators of the scene. Occasionally, however, a smothered cry told how keenly they participated in the misfortune of their friend, and the unusual horror of his position. Another motion, like the last lurch of a sinking ship, and the Indian hung suspended by the hands, and the hands only, seventy feet from the earth.

"It's almost over now," remarked Sutler. "It can't go on much longer; but the deluded critter is terribly attached to sublunar things."

"It strikes me there's something awful in it," replied the guide. "Them heathen creturs are quiet as death. I thought there warn't nothin' as could sober 'em down. Well, I don't wonder! Jest see the wretched cretur draw himself up lik an oel, when you're skinin' 'im alive. He wants to git back agin on to the limb; but that's onpossible. What a kind o' shudderin' went over him, then."

"Spasms," added Sutler, "spasms; nothin' but spasms. That comes o' the *plain shootin'*. You don't see no such nou'sins in the bridge o' the nose system. They bounce up like a ball, and lose their fakilities without a murmur. That's my kind."

"I almost pity the cretur," said Leroy. "I've seen a

great many *humans*, of all colors, go under; but I never saw one finished in that style afore, and don't wish to again. How his eyes stare out of his head. I should n't wonder if I dreamed of 'em for years to come."

Although the spectacle was too horrible to look at, I could look at nothing else. The wretched creature swung to and fro in the air, clinging with agonizing tenacity to the limb. It was his last frail hold of life; no wonder he clung to it. He might have met death with firmness in the usual manner or by torture among his enemies; but this was a different matter. How much longer this state things would have lasted, I know not. I heard the voice of Madeleine, as we sometimes hear welcome voices awaking us from a dreadful dream.

She threw herself at her father's feet, crying, in a voice of earnest entreaty,

"Put an end to this horrible barbarity, I entreat you!"

"The eye," said Sutler; "though I go in for the bridge o' the nose system."

Quick as lightning Leroy brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired. An instant longer the body quivered in the air then one hand relaxed its hold, the body trembled a second by the other, and there was a dead fall. All this passed before Madeleine had arisen from her knees. When she heard the sound which told that the tragedy was over, she flitted back to the camp, like an angel of mercy as she was.

"Bless the gal," said Leroy, wiping his eyes with the back of his powder-begrimed hand. "Bless the gal! Her rough old father would do anything for her."

The body had fallen upon the pickets, and was impaled upon a stick which chanced to be higher than its fellows. The head lay toward us, and the light of the moon revealed a wound in the left eye, and another about an inch below the *sternum*.

"He feels just as well now as if he'd died in bed with his moccasins off; or as he had n't been rubbed out by the *plain shootin'*," remarked Sutler, in a moralizing way.

The trapper pushed the body from the picket, and I felt relieved when the distorted visage was out of my sight.

The Crows appeared disheartened. They withdrew, and we heard no more from them that night. We saw several lurking about, the next day, but none came near enough for a shot. The following night was but a repetition of the one that preceded it; but it was a fact which could not be concealed, that their numbers were increasing, and, as near as we could judge, amounted to a round hundred. We kept them at bay as best we could. We never fired at random. Whenever a shot was heard from our camp, it was quite certain we had one enemy less.

My journal of that date has a note to the following effect:

"We have no rest, but are harassed by day and by night — regularly besieged. I should not care so much for this, were it not for the females. The prospect of another captivity to them is anything but cheering. I cannot endure the thought, sooner let me perish in their defence. Madeleine again in the power of Burril? — *Never*, while I live! But where is he? He does well to keep in the background. He knows the power of our rifles."

"Our food is failing — we ate our last morsel to-day; or, more properly, urged the females to do so. What shall we subsist on to-morrow? Wickliffe has not returned, although the period when he expected to return has passed. I feel the most painful apprehensions in regard to his fate. He bade me not expect him, if he came not within forty-eight hours. Inexplicable man! noble friend! Perhaps he has already ceased to exist. Even amid the horrors of this hour, I give a tear to his memory. Mary does not mention his name. She trembles and turns pale when she hears it spoken. Poor girl! I fear she will see the beloved object no more. . . . Things are growing worse and worse. The

As the reader may judge by the above extract, the sixth day of the siege found us in a melancholy position. Every hope seemed to be cut off. Even the stout hearts of the trapper and hunter were appalled at the dreary prospect before us. Basil strove to imitate the stoicism of the Indian under difficulties, and succeeded nobly. But where was the chief? Did his sterling qualities shine less brightly? No! the soul of the warrior and chieftain beamed forth more resplendently, as our sorrows accumulated. He was always at the post of danger, and his vigilance slumbered not for a moment.

His step was not less proud for famine, nor his bearing less bold. His voice and his shout were heard where the peril was most imminent, and it diffused new courage, and new hope when hope was sinking.

On the afternoon of the sixth day, I was alone with Mad-

eleine. The Crows had retired, and left us unmolested for an hour. The shouting had ceased, although at intervals a straggling shot went whistling over our heads, or lodged in the palisade. It was a moment of comparative quiet. Though we were famishing and dying, the sun shone brightly that day upon mountain and prairie.

We heard gentle winds whispering among the trees, and gentler melodies warbled by airy singers. To us these were solemn sounds, although, they still retained something of their former sweetness. We could not help thinking that sunshine, and soft winds, and mellow songs, would soon cease to be familiar to eye and ear.

I took Madeleine's hand. I was calm, but sad. Perhaps my voice shook a little when I spoke, and my eyes had an unnatural wildness.

"Madeleine," I said, and my tones made her tremble. "Madeleine, we seem to be nearing the final home of the weary wanderer upon earth. It would be useless to attempt to conceal from you the truth. A few more suns without relief, and it will be all over. Before it is too late, I will speak to you, and hope to give no offence. Why have I left the scenes familiar to my childhood, and the home of civilized man? Why have I been a pilgrim in the wilderness? Why have I encountered danger and privation with alacrity and cheerfulness? I answer, for the sake of Madeleine. When have I been happy and hopeful? When near her, and only then. When have I been wretched and despairing? When she was away and in danger. Madeleine has been my cloud to direct me onward in my pilgrimage by day, and my pillar of fire to illuminate my dreams by night. But I have been to her as a brother, and a brother only. I have scorned to take undue advantage of our companionship heretofore; but now I say for the first time, and perhaps the last, *Madeleine, I love you!*"

At first a few tears trembled on the dark lashes of the maiden; but as I proceeded, she wiped them away, and her face beamed like an angel's.

"If we were not in danger," she said in a voice scarcely audible, but which grew firmer as she went on, "it might be unmaidenly to say what I am about to utter, but, as it is, and as we are about to die (unless Heaven sends some good angel to save us)—it would ill become me not to speak the truth. The love you have lavished upon the unworthy maiden, Madeleine, is returned; she has confessed it. Under ordinary circumstances she never would; her tongue would not have courage to speak the words."

I drew Madeleine to my heart and was happy, in spite of famine and starvation. While I held her there, and wept over her, I felt a hand laid gently on my head. I looked up—the tall figure of Leroy, the guide, stood beside me. Tears were rolling down the cheeks begrimed with powder and smoke.

"God bless you, doctor!—my boy—my son, I had hoped to live to see this. She's a good gal—my child is—an angel of a gal. God bless her heart!"

The good old man joined our hands, and blessed us over and over again; and then Madge, Mary and Basil embraced and wept over us like children.

"I can't stand that, nohow," said Sutler (who had looked in upon us), drawing the sleeve of his greasy hunting-shirt across his shaggy lashes. "If the doctor hasn't any objections, I'd like to kiss that angelic critter once."

Madeleine bounded gracefully to the side of the old trapper, and taking his rough hand, offered him her cheek. He gazed at her a moment in silence.

"I can't do it," said he, mournfully. "I've been a man o' blood, and I won't contaminate your young cheek with my lips. I don't deserve to kiss your hand even, but I will; and now add my God bless you to your old father's; and, if ever we should live to get out o' this, I hope you'll think o' the sinful old man, now and then in your prayers."

"You're a kind, good, whole-souled cretur," said Leroy, "and I hope you'll live a great many years yet. If I had a hundred gals, you might kiss 'em all in welcome, and they wouldn't be none the worse for 't. But, bless my soul! there's Wickliffe!"

All eyes were turned toward the camp-door; and Wickliffe stood there, with his arms folded upon his breast, while traces of emotion were visible upon his face.

"I have been an unobserved witness of this scene," he said with some effort. "I wish you all joy and happiness, and, if Heaven rewards the virtuous and punishes the guilty, you will be blessed indeed."

Madeleine and myself were the first to spring forward and embrace Wickliffe. As I held his hand in mine, I whispered in his ear.

"You love Mary, and she reciprocates your feelings. Do not let your pride render you wretched for life."

The countenance of Wickliffe relaxed, and he returned the warm pressure of my hand.

"Do you love her?" whispered Madeleine.

"More than that—since you ask me—I wor-

ship her. Every spot is sacred to me where she has been. I am happy only in her presence."

"Thank God! Then my sister will not be wretched. Give me your hand, sir. Mary, why do you not greet our benefactor? For shame, girl! Come along!"

Mary timidly approached. Madeleine adroitly placed her hand in Wickliffe's.

"What, another one!" exclaimed the guide.

"Leroy," said Wickliffe, with dignity, "I love your daughter—tenderly, truly, devotedly, deeply as man should love confiding woman; but, if it is not agreeable to her and you, I will leave you, and trouble you no more."

"I have been without food a little better nor two days, and I feel an onpleasant gnawin' at the stomach, but I was never so happy afore in my life, except when Madge said yes. Bless your hearts, the old man couldn't wish for nothin' better."

"Them's my feelin's," said Sutler, "only perhaps I couldn't get 'em off so well."

"I respond to it all," added Basil, "though an indefinite quantity of buffalo-meat wouldn't come amiss arter you all get through. I feel jest about as *holler* as a grave-yard."

"I give you a mother's blessing," said Madge, "and a mother's blessing is a good thing to start with in life."

"Are you content?" whispered Wickliffe to Mary.

"Happy!" was the response.

"Ferguson," said Wickliffe, in a low tone, "I will tell you a secret, for there may be fighting to do soon, and I would not have it perish with me, if I should fall. Be calm, and do not discredit what I am about to say. We are brothers; but your mother was not mine. Neglected and disowned by him to whom I owe my existence, is it strange that when I grew to manhood I should seek to hide myself from the sententious world, that I might not hear its sneering voice linking my name with dishonor? I have been an outcast and a misanthrope, for my parents placed an ignoble mark upon my name and memory. The story of my wanderings is long, and this is no time to relate it; but at some future time you shall know more of the life of Wickliffe, the hunter of the Rocky Mountains."

My heart was too full for words; and I shed tears on Wickliffe's neck, as certain people wept over Paul, once on a time, many years ago.

"Your mother sleeps under the green turf, and the knowledge of this truth cannot grieve her now. Do you wonder I have taken an interest in you? I recognized the lineaments of my father's face in yours, before you announced your name. I had certain knowledge that danger was near you, when I met you for the first time; but I knew not its precise character. I received some hints from an Indian whom I met, that induced me to warn you to watchfulness. I have friends among certain tribes. I went to rally them for your protection, but they were beyond my reach. I returned to you the next morning, and you know the rest."

I lost no time in making known this unexpected discovery to my friends.

"Well, you do look alike; that's sartin," said Leroy.

"The resemblance struck me at first sight," rejoined Madge.

"I can't say I see any resemblance," added Mary.

"I suppose you think the elder brother the best looking," retorted Madeleine.

"Very much alike," said Silver-Knife. "The pale medicine man has the same curl of the lip, the same fire in his eye, when excited."

"And some of the same pride also," said Mary.

"Pardon me, my friends, if I forgot for a moment that you are famishing," exclaimed Wickliffe. Stepping to the camp door, he made a gesture with his hand. Immediately two Indians made their appearance, bearing an abundance of the choicest viands the wilderness could afford.

We all, save Basil, made a simultaneous movement to the door. To our utter amazement, the enclosure was full of Blackfeet.

"These are my friends," said Wickliffe. "I am a chief among them, of some importance. Whatever they may be to others, they are faithful to me."

"But how did you come upon us, and gain admission so silently?"

"Basil will tell you," he replied. "He admitted us with his own hand. Don't give yourself any uneasiness; we did not find you sleeping or off your guard; but you recollect you were very busy about that time," and Wickliffe gave Madeleine a significant glance.

"Very uncommon busy," rejoined Basil, who at that moment joined us, with a good-humored grin.

I have but little more to relate. I will not linger over these pages. I have already dwelt longer than I intended. Ending a tale is something like taking leave of a fellow-traveler on a strange road; we part with him expecting never to meet again.

Food never tasted sweeter than it did that night. We satisfied the demands of our starving stomachs, thanked God, and were happy.

Sutler very philosophically observed "that sublunar things never looked brighter."

Near the hour of midnight, a general assault was made by the Crows. For the first time during the siege, the voice of Burrill was heard. It was loud, stormy, terrible as ever, and incited the savages to fight with desperate valor. They attempted to scale our pickets, ignorant of the reinforcement we had received. We repulsed them with great slaughter, and not only repulsed but pursued them to their covert. I caught sight of Burrill, singled him out—pursued him. He turned upon me like a tiger at bay; I fired, and he fell.

"You have triumphed at last," said he, in a feeble voice. "Triumphed at last; but it has been by no good will of mine."

"Been doin' a little plain shootin', haven't ye, doctor?" said Sutler, approaching, with an unconcerned look. "Well every man to his likin', though I goes in for the bridge o' the nose system, notwithstanding. I'm happy to say that you'll find some o' the nateral varmin o' this unhappy sile hereabouts who are monuments o' the bridge o' the nose system."

"I believe I'm dying," said Burrill, lifting himself upon his elbow, and staring wildly upon him.

"And it's my humble opinion that you're as unprepared for the change as ever a critter was," continued Sutler, addressing himself to Burrill. "There's no use in cryin' for what can't be helped. It's my conviction that the time has come when you must go, willin' or not willin'. You're wanted, and it's no use to kick back on the rope. If you can recollect anything kind o' pious like, you'd better say it."

The dying man motioned me away with his hand.

"He don't like to see you, doctor, and you'd better keep out o' his sight."

I fell back, where he could not see me.

"You think I'm going?" said Burrill, with a shudder.

"Them's my feelin's," answered the trapper, "and you'd better be gettin' ready. The plain shootin' has done your business."

"Can't you speak a word for me, old man?"

"I'm a sinful man, and it's my convictions my words wouldn't prevail. The Master o' life, as the Injins call him, is pertickler about sich things; but then, old feller, he's very merciful. Try and think o' sumthin'."

An expression of unutterable horror played for a moment over the features of Burrill. He fell back upon the earth, straightened out his limbs convulsively, and died.

I was sorry that I had dealt the wound that sped him.

We journey in safety to the land of the Nez Perces, the Horeb of the Leroy. I will not stop to tell how we went a great distance for a priest, and what a wedding-party we had, and how happy every one was, and how numbers of Indians danced, and how some of them got rather the worse for strong water—not I. I'll keep it all to myself, as well as the fact of Basil's espousal with the "Morning Star," the daughter of our old friend, Silver-Knife; neither shall I make known how delighted the latter was at having Basil for a son-in-law, or how beautiful the bride was. I am very close and particular on these subjects, because a great deal of scandal often comes of being too communicative.

I will remark, however, that I thought there was a fair prospect of Sutler and the "Singing Bird" getting up a small match on their own private account, and, if you can make anything of it, you may.

As for Madeleine and myself, we were happy, and envied no one, not even Wickliffe and Mary, and their cup of happiness was on the eve of running over. * * *

Silver-Knife is yet hale and strong. We shall miss his pleasant face when he goes to the happy hunting-grounds.

Sutler still "goes in" for the "bridge o' the nose system," and Leroy talks of the "heathen creturs." There is no great fear that either will lose his "fakilities" very soon. So far as human foresight extends, they will cling to "sublunar things" for many a long day to come.

Wickliffe, the hunter of the Rocky Mountains, is little changed, and that change is for the better.

THE END.

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BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

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